

EMBLEMS OF LOVE  
BY  
LACOMBE ABERCROMBIE





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EMBLEMS OF LOVE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR  
INTERLUDES AND POEMS

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# EMBLEMS OF LOVE

DESIGNED IN SEVERAL DISCOURSES  
BY LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

*“ Wonder it is to see in diverse mindes  
How diversly love doth his pageaunts play ”*

*“ Ego tamquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo  
se habent circumferentiæ partes ”*

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TO  
MY WIFE

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## EMBLEMS OF LOVE



# EMBLEMS OF LOVE

## HYMN TO LOVE

We are thine, O Love, being in thee and made of thee,  
As thóu, Lóve, were the déep thóught  
And we the speech of the thought ; yea, spoken are we,  
Thy fires of thought out-spoken :

But burn'd not through us thy imagining  
Like fiérrc móod in a sóng cáught,  
We were as clamour'd words a fool may fling,  
Loose words, of meaning broken.

For what more like the brainless speech of a fool,—  
The lives travelling dark fears,  
And as a boy throws pebbles in a pool  
Thrown down abysmal places ?

Hazardous are the stars, yet is our birth  
And our journeying time theirs ;  
As words of air, life makes of starry earth  
Sweet soul-delighted faces ;

## EMBLEMS OF LOVE

As voices are we in the worldly wind ;  
    The great wind of the world's fate  
Is turned, as air to a shapen sound, to mind  
    And marvellous desires.

But not in the world as voices storm-shatter'd,  
    Not borne down by the wind's weight ;  
The rushing time rings with our splendid word  
    Like darkness filled with fires.

For Love doth use us for a sound of song,  
    And Love's meaning our life wields,  
Making our souls like syllables to throng  
    His tunes of exultation.

Down the blind speed of a fatal world we fly,  
    As rain blown along earth's fields ;  
Yet are we god-desiring liturgy,  
    Sung joys of adoration ;

Yea, made of chance and all a labouring strife,  
    We go charged with a strong flame ;  
For as a language Love hath seized on life  
    His burning heart to story.

Yea, Love, we are thine, the liturgy of thee,  
    Thy thought's golden and glad name,  
The mortal conscience of immortal glee,  
    Love's zeal in Love's own glory.

## **PART I**

### **DISCOVERY AND PROPHECY**



## PRELUDE

*Night on bleak downs ; a high grass-grown trench runs athwart the slope. The earthwork is manned by warriors clad in hides. Two warriors, BRYs and GAST, talking.*

*Gast.*

This puts a tall heart in me, and a tune  
Of great glad blood flowing brave in my flesh,  
To see thee, after all these moons, returned,  
My Brys. If there's no rust in thy shoulder-joints,  
That battle-wrath of thine, and thy good throwing,  
Will be more help for us than if the dyke  
Were higher by a span.—Ha ! there was howling  
Down in the thicket ; they come soon, for sure.

*Brys.*

Has there been hunger in the forest long ?

*Gast.*

I think, not only hunger makes them fierce :  
They broke not long since into a village yonder,  
A huge throng of them ; all through the night we heard  
The feasting they kept up. And that has made  
The wolves blood-thirsty, I believe.

*Brys.*

O fools

To keep so slack a waking on their dykes !  
Now have they made a sleepless winter for us.  
Every night we must look, lest the down-slope  
Between us and the woods turn suddenly  
To a grey onrush full of small green candles,  
The charging pack with eyes flaming for flesh.  
And well for us then if there's no more mist  
Than the white panting of the wolfish hunger.

*Gast.*

They'll come to-night. Three of us hunting went  
Among the trees below : not long we stayed.  
All the wolves of the world are in the forest,  
And man's the meat they're after.

*Brys.*

Ay, it must be

Blood-thirst is in them, if they come to-night,  
Such clear and starry weather.—What dost thou make,  
Gast, of the stars ?

*Gast.*

Brother, they're horrible.

I always keep my head as much as I may  
Bent so they cannot look me in the eyes.

*Brys.*

I never had this awe. The fear I have  
Is not a load I crouch beneath, but something  
Proud and wonderful, that lifteth my heart.

Yea, I look on a night of stars with fear  
 That comes close against glee. 'Tis like the fear  
 I have for the wolves, that maketh me joy-mad  
 To drive the yellow flint-edge through their shags.  
 So when I gaze on stars, they speak high fear  
 Into my soul ; and strangely I think they mean  
 The fear must prompt me to some unknown war.

*Gast.*

Be thou well ware of this. I have not told thee  
 How the stars, with their perilous overlooking,  
 Have raught away from all his manhood Gwat,  
 Our fiercest strength. For when the conquering wolves  
 Into that village won, we in our huts  
 Lay hearkening to their rejoicing hunger ;  
 But Gwat stayed out in the stars all night long.  
 I peered at him as much as that whipt dog,  
 My heart, had daring for ; and he stood stiff,  
 With all his senses aiming at the noise.  
 Some strong bad eagerness kept tightly rigged  
 The cordage of his body, till his nerves  
 Loosed on a sudden. He yelled, " What do we here,  
 High up among bleak winds, always afraid  
 Of murder from the wolves ? I will be man  
 No more ; the grey four-footed fellows have  
 The good meats of the world, and the best lodging,  
 Forest and weald." And then he wolfish howled,  
 And hurled off towards the snarling and the baying.  
 And now his soul wears the strength and fury  
 Of a huge dun-pelted wolf ; he's the wolves' king ;  
 And the fiends have learnt from him to laugh at our flints.  
 Now always in the assaults there's one great beast,

With yellow eyes and hackles like a mane,  
That plays the captain, first to reach the dyke ;  
And I have heard that when he stands upright  
To ramp against the bulwarks, in his throat  
Are chattering yelps half tongued to grisly words.  
Doubtless to-night thou'lt see him, leading his pack,  
And with his jaws savagely tampering  
With our earth-built safety.—But now, Brys,  
Is it not certain that the stars have done  
This evil to Gwat's heart, and curdled all  
The manhood in him ?

*Brys.*

When I was wanderer,  
I came upon a lake, set in a land  
Which has no fear of wolves. A fisher folk  
Live there in houses stilted over the water,  
And the stars walk like spectres of white fire  
Upon the misty waters of the mere.  
Ay, if they have no wolves, they have the fear  
All as thou hast ; the sedges in the night  
Shudder, and out of the reeds there comes a cry  
Half chuckling, half bewailing ; but, as I think,  
It is the mallard calling. Now among  
This haunted folk, I markt a man who went  
With shining eyes, and a joy in his face, about  
His needs of living. Clear it was to me  
He knew of some sweet race in his daily wont  
Which blest him wonderly. I lived with him,  
And from him learnt marvels. Yea, for he gave me  
A wit to see in our earth more than fear.  
Brother, how shall I tell thee, who hast still

Fear-poisoned nerves, that like a priest he brewed  
 My heart keen drink from out the look of earth?—  
 Gast, is it nothing to thee that all in green  
 The wolds go heaping up against the blue?  
 And is it only fear to thee that night  
 Is thatched with stars?—Ah, but I took his wit  
 Further than he e'er did; in women I found  
 The same amazement for my wakened eyes  
 As in the hills and waters. Ay, gape at me,  
 And think me bitten by some evil tooth;  
 But as a quiet stream at the cliff's edge  
 Breaks its smooth habit into a loud white force,  
 So this delight the earth pours over me  
 Leaps out of women with such excellence,  
 It seems as I must brace my sinews to it,—  
 The comely fashion of their limbs, their eyes,  
 Their gait, and the way they use their arms. And now  
 My eyes have a message to my heart from them  
 Such as thou only through a blind skin hast.  
 Therefore I came back here;—I scarce know why,  
 But now that women are to me not only  
 The sacred friends of hidden Awe, not only  
 Mistresses of the world's unseen foison,  
 Ay, and not only ease for throbbing groins,  
 But things mine eyes enjoy as mine ears take songs,  
 Vision that beats a timbrel in my blood,  
 Dreams for my sleeping sight, that move aired round  
 With wonder, as trembling covers a hearth,—  
 It seems I must be fighting for them, must  
 Run through some danger to them now before  
 Delighting in them. I am here to fight  
 Wolves for the joy of the world, marvellous women!

*Gast.*

Star-madden'd ! What is this in earth and women  
That pricks thee into wrath against the wolves ?  
Do I not fight for women too ? But I  
For what is certain in them, not for madness.

*Brys.*

I make my fierceness of a mind to set  
My spirit high up in the winds of joy,  
Before I tumble down into the darkness.  
Not thus thy women send thee to thy fighting :  
All fear thy battle-courage is, fear-bred  
Thine anger. Thou heavily drudgest women,  
But yet thou art afraid of them.

*Gast.*

Ay, truly ;  
For look how from their wondrous bodies comes  
Increase : who knoweth where such power ends ?  
They are in league with the great Motherhood  
Who brings the seasons forth in the open world ;  
And if to them She hands, unseen by us,  
Their marvellous bringing forth of children, what  
Spirit of Her great dreadful mountain-spell,  
Wherein the rocks have purpose against us,  
Sealed up in watchful quiet stone, may not  
Pass on to their dark minds, that seem so mild,  
Yet are so strange ; or what charm'd word from out  
Her forests whispering endless dangerous things,  
Wherefrom our hunters often have run crazed  
To hear the trees devising for their souls ;

What secret share of Her earth's monstrous power  
 May She not also grant to women's lives ?  
 Yea, wise is our fear of women ; but we fight  
 For more than fear ; we give them liking too.  
 Who but the women can deliver us  
 From this continual siege of the wolves' hunger ?  
 High above comfort, on the shrugging backs  
 Of downland, where the winds parch our skins, and frost  
 Kneads through our flesh until his fingers clamp  
 The aching bones, our scanty families  
 Hold out against the ravin of the wolves,  
 Fended by earthwork, fighting them with flint.  
 But if we keep the favour of our women,  
 They will breed sons to us so many and strong  
 We shall have numbers that will make us dare  
 Invade the weather-shelter'd woods, and build  
 Villages where now only wolves are denn'd ;  
 Yea, to the beasts shall the man-folk become  
 Malice that haunts their ways, even as now  
 Our leaguer'd tribes must lurk and crouch afraid  
 Of wolfish malice always baying near.  
 And fires, stackt hugely high with timber, shall  
 With nightlong blaze make friendly the dark and cold,  
 Cheer our bodies, and roast great feasts of flesh,—  
 Ah, to burn trunks of trees, not bracken and ling !  
 This is what women are to me,—a fear  
 Lest the earth-hidden Awe, who unseen gives  
 The childing to their flesh, should make their minds  
 As darkly able as their wombs, with power  
 To think sorceries over us ; and hope  
 That with their breeding they will dispossess  
 The beasts of the good lowlands, until man,

No longer fled to the hills, inhabit all  
The comfort of the earth.

*Brys.*

These are mine too,  
But as great rivers own the brook's young speed.  
For in my soul, the women do not dwell  
A torch going through darkness, with a troop  
Of shadows gesturing after ; but as the sun  
Upon his height of golden blaze at noon,  
With all the size of the blue air about him.  
Fear that in women the unseen is seen  
And the unknown power sits beside us known,—  
This fear is good, but better is than this  
Their beauty, and the wells of joy in women.  
I speak dumb words to thee ; but know thou, Gast,  
My soul is looking at the time to come,  
And seeing it not as a cavern lit  
With smoky burning brandons of thy fear,  
But as a day shining with my new joy.  
Thou canst not fight with me for the coming heart  
Of man,—fear cannot fight with joy. And I  
Am setting such a war of joy against thee,  
It shall be as man's heart became a god  
Murdering thy mind of weakling darkness.  
All the hot happiness of being wroth  
And seeing a stroke leave behind it wound,  
The pleasures of wily hunting, and a feast  
After long famine, and the dancing stored  
Within the must of berries,—these, and all  
Gladdenings that make thrill the being of man  
Shall pour, mixt with an unknown rage of glee,

Into the meaning men shall find in women.  
 And if we have at all a fear of them,  
 It shall not be the old ignorant dismay,  
 But of their very potency to delight,  
 The way their looks make Will an enemy  
 Hating itself, shall men become afraid.  
 Women shall cause men know for why they have  
 Being in the earth ;—not to be quailing slack  
 As if the whole world were a threat, but tuned  
 Ready for joy as harp-strings for the player.  
 And great desire of beauty and to be glad  
 Shall prompt our courages. Ha, what are those  
 Breaking from out the thickets ?

*Gast.*

Wolves ! They come !  
 Brothers, the fiends are on us : have good hearts !  
 Ho for the women and their sacred wombs !

*Brys.*

Ho for the women, their beauty and my pleasure !

## VASHTI

### I

#### AHASUERUS AND VASHTI

*Vashti.*

My lord requires me here.

*Ahasuerus.*

Does Heaven see this ?

Dare I have this one humble unto me ?  
Was it not enough, Stars, to have given me  
This marriage ? but you must persuade your God  
To have me as well the greatest king beneath you !  
Look you now if men grow not insolent  
Because of me, a man so throned, so wived.  
Yea, and in me insolent groweth my love ;  
For if the wheels of the careering world  
Brake, felley and spoke, that, pitching on the road,  
It spilt the driving godhead from his seat,  
And the unreined team of hours riskily dragg'd  
Their crippled duty,—if in that lurching world  
Like jarrèd glass my power shattered about me,  
And I were a head unking'd, 'twere but a game,  
So I were left possessing thee, and that

Escape from Heaven, the beauty that goes with thee.  
 Here is an insolence ! Hast thou not wonder'd,  
 Vashti, what gave thee into such a love,  
 That in the brain of me, the chosen king,  
 It is so loud, so insolent, thy love ?  
 O this shrill sweet heart-mastering love !

*Vashti.*

Alas,

Do I deserve that love ?—But yes, I wonder ;  
 For what am I that the king loveth me ?  
 Lo, I am woman, thou art man, the lord ;  
 Out of mere bounty are we loved of you,  
 And not for our deserving. We are to sit  
 In a high calm, and not go down and help  
 Among the toil, and choosing, chosen, find  
 Companionship therein. For thou, for man  
 Has such a treasure in his heart of love,  
 It must be squandered out in charity,  
 Not used as a gentle money to repay  
 Worth (as a woman spends her love). A trick  
 Of posture in a girl, and see the alms  
 Of generous love man will enrich her with !  
 Might there not be sometimes too much of alms  
 About his love ? But we will blink at that.  
 Yet sometimes we are liked ashamed, to be  
 Taking so much love from you, all for naught.  
 Now therefore tell me, Man, my king, my master :  
 Lovest thou me, or dost thou rather love  
 The pleasure thou hast in me ? This is not nice,  
 Believe me. They're more sundered, these two loves,  
 Than if all the braving seas marcht between them.

*Ahasuerus.*

What, shrinking from thine own delightsomeness ?  
Hear then. Nature, so ordered from the God,  
Has given strength to man and work to do,  
But to woman gave that she should be delight  
For man, else like an overdriven ox  
Heart-broke. The world was made for man, but made  
Wisely a steep difficulty to be climbed,  
That he, so labouring the stubborn slant,  
May step from off the world with a well-used courage,  
All slouch disgrace fought out of him, a man  
Well worthy of a Heaven. And this great part  
Has woman in the work ; that man, fordome  
And wearied, may find lodging out of the noise  
Upon her breast, and looking in her eyes  
May wash in pools of kindness, fresh as Heaven,  
The soil of sweat and trouble from his limbs ;  
And turning aside into this pleasant inn  
Called woman, there is entertainment kept  
For man, such that for cheating craftily  
The stabled palter'd heart that it can pass  
Through the world's grillage and be large as fate,  
The sweet anxiety of reeded pipes  
Is a mere thing to it. Like Heaven street  
When the steel of God's army surges through it,  
Bright anger burning on an errand of swords,  
So is the sense of man when woman-joy  
Pours through his flesh a throng of deity,  
White clamorous flame ; yea, desire of woman  
Maketh the mind of more room for amazement  
Than that blue loft hath for the light, more charged

With spiritual joy that goes in stress  
 As far as tears, with this more throbbingly charged  
 Than the starr'd night wept full of silver fires,—  
 Dangerously endured, labours of joy !  
 Is it not virtuous, not powerful, this ?  
 Wouldst thou have more ? Man knows he can possess  
 Than woman's beauty nought more treasurable.  
 And high above our loud activities  
 We keep, pure as the dawn, the house of love,  
 Woman, wherein we entering leave outside  
 Our rank sweat-drenchèd weeds of toil, and there  
 Enjoy ourselves, out of the world, awhile.

*Vashti (aside).*

O yes, I know. Filthiness ! Filthiness !

*Ahasuerus.*

Now here have I been toiling under press  
 Of glory. Should I not stumble in my gait,  
 Were there no Vashti, and with her a welcome  
 I do not need to buy, since all she wants  
 Is that I love her ? Going in unto her  
 I may unstrap my burdensous pack of kingship,  
 Shift me of reign, and escape my splendour.  
 Yea, and strange largeness in this power of love  
 For men too much limited ! Now I am sick  
 Of knowing my greatness, now I want to be  
 Placed where my soul can feel vast room about me,  
 To be contained. Outside, among the men,  
 I am the room of the world ; I and my rule  
 Contain the world ; and I am sick thereof.  
 Vashti can remedy this ; for here thy beauty

More spacious is for my senses to be in,  
Than his own golden kingdom for the sun.

*Vashti.*

Thine eyes are glad with me ? I please the King ?

*Ahasuerus.*

Eyes ? But there is no nerve thou takest not,  
No way of my life thronging not with thee,  
And my blood sounds at the story of thy beauty.  
What thing shall be held up to woman's beauty ?  
Where are the bounds of it ? Yea, what is all  
The world, but an awning scaffolded amid  
The waste perilous Eternity, to lodge  
This Heaven-wander'd princess, woman's beauty ?  
The East and West kneel down to thee, the North  
And South, and all for thee their shoulders bear  
The load of fourfold place. As yellow morn  
Runs on the slippery waves of the spread sea,  
Thy feet are on the griefs and joys of men  
That sheen to be thy causey. Out of tears,  
Indeed, and blitheness, murder and lust and love,  
Whatever has been passionate in clay,  
Thy flesh was tempered. Behold in thy body  
The yearnings of all men measured and told,  
Insatiate endless agonies of desire  
Given thy flesh, the meaning of thy shape !  
What beauty is there, but thou makest it ?  
How is earth good to look on, woods and fields  
The seasons' garden, and the courageous hills,  
All this green raft of earth moored in the seas ?

The manner of the sun to ride the air,  
The stars God has imagined for the night ?  
What's this behind them, that we cannot near,  
Secret still on the point of being blabbed,  
The ghost in the world that flies from being named ?  
Where do they get their beauty from, all these ?  
They do but glaze a lantern lit for man,  
And woman's beauty is the flame therein  
Feeding on sacred oil, man's desire,  
A golden flame possessing all the earth.  
Or as a queen upon an embassy  
From out some mountain-guarded far renown,  
Brings caravans stockt from her slavish mines,  
Her looms and forges, with a precious friendship ;  
So comest thou from the chambers of the stars  
On thy famed visit unto man the king ;  
So bringing from the mints and shops of Heaven,  
Where thou didst own labours of all the fates,  
A shining traffic, all that man calls beauty :  
There is no holding out for the heart of man  
Against thee and such custom. O hard to be borne,  
Often hard to be borne is woman's beauty !—  
And well I guess it does but cover up  
Enmity, hanging falseness between our souls,  
And buy at a dishonest price the mouth  
True nature hath for thee, to speak thee fair.  
Were not man's thought so gilded with thy beauty,  
Woman, and caught in the desire of thee,  
O, there'd be hatred in his use of thee.  
You should be thankful for your pleasantness !

*Vashti.*

Yes, I am thankful. For I hope, my lord,  
We women know our style. Ay, we are fooled  
Sometimes with heady tampering thoughts, that come  
To bother our submission, I confess.  
We to ourselves have said, that when God took  
The fierce beginning of the unwrought world  
From out his fiery passion, and, breathing cool,  
Tamed the wild molten being, with his hands  
Fashion'd and workt the hot clay into world,  
Then with green mercy quieted the land  
And claspt it with the summer of blue seas,  
With brooches of white spray along the shores,—  
It was to be an equal dwelling-place  
For humans that he did it, into sex  
Unknowably dividing human kind.  
But wickedly we say this. God made man  
For his delight and praise, and then made woman  
For man's delight and praise, submit to man.  
Else wherefore sex? And it is better thus,  
To be man's pleasure. What noble work is ours,  
To have our bodies proper for your love,  
The means of your delight! Ay, and minds too,  
Sometimes; we think, we women think we know  
What shape of mind pleases our masters best,  
And that we build up in us. A tender shyness,  
A coy reluctaney,—we use these well.  
Man is our master; it is best for us  
Persuading him line our captivity  
With wool-soft love, lest it be bitter iron.

*Ahasuerus.*

This is the marvel's head, that thou, so fair,  
And loved by me, should keep so good a mind.  
—They shall not see thee, when I display at large  
The riches and the honour ; I've enough  
Possession, without thee, to stupify  
The assembly of my men, my herd of kings.  
I mean there shall not be a hint of doubt  
About whose world this is. So I have bid,  
From all the utter regions of my land,  
The kings whom I allow to rule, who breathe  
My air, to feast with me and for a while  
Flatter their trivial lives with a brief relish  
Of being king of the world's kings in Shushan.  
Yea, and I will dismay their wits with splendour ;  
No noise shall be against me in the world.  
I am more open, kinder than Lord God,  
Who never shows how much he has of thunder ;  
Wherefore against him men presume, and go  
Often out of his ways extravagant.  
But all the fear I keep obedient by me  
Now to the gather'd world I openly shew.  
So God is spoken against, I am never,  
And I have a better terror in the world ;  
And chiefly for the happiness built round me  
Divinely firm. O all the kings, my men,  
Shall fear this terrible happiness of mine !  
But thee I will not shew ; I'll have some wealth  
Not public. I'll have no adulteries,  
No eyes but mine enjoying thee. To me  
The sight of thee, all as the touch of thee,

Belongeth, only my pleasure thou art :  
None but my senses shall come unto thee,  
And I will keep my pleasure pure as Heaven.  
Happy art thou, Vashti, to have wedded  
One who so dearly rates possession of thee.  
Better it is to spend my heart on thee  
Than on any of the women that I have.

## II

## THE FEAST OF KINGS : MIDNIGHT

*Ahasuerus.*

You kings, you thrones that burn about the world,  
Whom yet I king, lifted higher above you  
Than you are lifted up above your folks :  
This is my day. I have agreed with Heaven,  
My fellow in the fear of the world, to have  
This day unshar'd ; and it is all mine,  
All that the Gods from baseless fires and steams  
Have harden'd into the place and kind of the world :  
The great high quiet journey of the stars,  
And all the golden hours which the sun  
Utters aloft in heaven ;—the whole is mine  
To fill with ceremonies of my throne.  
This one day, I am where Heaven and I  
Commonly stand together ; you shall not have  
Shelter from me in a worshipt God to-day,  
Kings ; look yonder at many-power'd night,  
Telling her beauty to the sea and taking  
The prone adoring waters into her blue

Desire, setting them as herself on flame  
 With perils of joy, lending them her achieved  
 Raptures, her white experiences of stars.  
 So shall your souls lie under me these hours ;  
 As they were waters shall they be beneath  
 My burning, set alight with me, and none  
 Escape from utterly understanding me  
 And why I am so kindled in my soul.

Who has been like to me ? My name travels  
 A hundred seven and twenty languages,  
 My name a ship upon them, trading fear.  
 My unseen power weighs upon the heads  
 Of nations, like the blown abasement given  
 By sedges when they are wretched to the wind.  
 Ay, and the farthest goings of the air  
 Can reach no land my taxes do not labour.  
 The fear of me is the conscience of the world.  
 Ahasuerus is a region large  
 As there is light upon the earth ; when dawn  
 With golden duties celebrates the sun,  
 It does but serve to fetch the lives I own  
 Out of shadow flinching into the light,—  
 Out of sleep's mercy the sore lives that know  
 Only a penal sun, that are so chapt  
 In winds of my sent spirit : I care not, I.  
 For as my flesh out of my father's joy  
 Came, fraught from him with hunger for like joy,—  
 As, when roused ages of desire within me  
 Play with my blood as storms play with the sea,  
 And all my senses tug one way like sails,  
 My flesh obeys, and into that perilous dream,  
 Woman, exults ;—so, but much more, my soul,

That had its faculties from far beyond  
The tingling loam of flesh, obeys a need :  
Conquest, and nations to enjoy with war.  
For 'tis a need that rode down out of God  
Upon my journeying soul into this world's  
Affairs, like smouldering fire besiegers throw  
Among a city's roofs, which cannot choose  
But take blaze from the whole town's timber ; so  
My soul's desire for flame hath charred the world.  
Till now, as the night full of perfect fires,  
I, full of conquests, am large over you.  
And you must be like waters underneath me,  
Full of my burning ; there's no more for me  
Now, but to dwell alone in my still soul's  
Hoarding of ecstasies, a great place of lusts  
Achieved and shining fixt ; for every man  
Is mine, and every soil is mine, from here  
Round to the furthest cliffs that steadfast are  
To keep the hoofs of the sea from murdering  
The tilled leagues of the land. And by the coasts  
I am not kept. Far into the room of waters,  
Into the blue middle of ocean's summer,  
The white gait of my sea-going war invades.

I have a man here, one who makes with words,  
And he shall be my messenger to your hearts.  
Not to make much of me ; but he's the speech  
Of Spirit,—I the dangerous exultation,  
The Spirit's sacred joy in wrath against  
The heaps of its own spent kinds, melting anew  
To found in another image of itself.  
He is the man to shew you, withinside  
The flashing and exclaim of my great moving

About the places of the world ; within  
 The heat of my pleasure that has molten down,  
 Like ingots in a furnace, all your nations  
 Into my likeness treading on the earth ;  
 Within the smokes that make your eyes pour grief,  
 This gleam of infinite purpose quietly nested,—  
 That I am given the world, and that my pleasure  
 Is plain the latest word spoken by God.  
 So while our senses go among these wines,  
 Wander in green deliciousness and crimson,  
 And fragrance searches the else-unsearchable brain,  
 Poet, tell out the glory of the king.

*The Poet.*

The glory of the king of all the kings.—  
 You with the golden power on your brows,  
 You kings, I think you know not what you are.  
 First you shall learn yourselves : for neither light  
 Understandeth itself, nor darkness light.  
 You see your glory ; but you cannot see  
 That which your glory conquers ; and the peoples  
 Know nought but that the glooming of their night  
 Maketh a shining scope for crowns, as he,  
 Even as he, your king, Ahasuerus,  
 Maketh your splendour a darkness for his light.  
 But I, neither belonging to the kings  
 Nor to the people, only I may know  
 The golden fortune of light anointing kings.  
 Come with me now, and take my vision awhile.

The people of this world are misery.  
 What doth Man here ? How thinketh God on him ?  
 Surely he was sent here as if thereby

God might forget him. Like infamous desire  
A wise heart puts aside, which yet remains  
A secret hated memory, man was  
In God, and is vainly discarded here.  
I see him coming here ; I see man's life  
Falling into this base and desert ground,  
This world that seems an evil riddance thrown  
Down by the winds of God's swift purposes ;  
Some shame of grossness, that would cling upon  
The errand of their holy speed, and here  
Heapt up and strewn into the place wherein  
The mind and being of man wander darkly.  
Behold him coming here !—Against my sight,  
Warning aback the gleam of sacred heaven,  
Is vast forbiddance raised ; creatures like hills,  
Or darkness surging at the coasts of light,  
Stand, a great barricade behind our lives,  
Rankt as Eternity had put on stature.  
The sharp sides of the peaks are finger'd white  
With flame, lit by the fires of God beyond ;  
The rest is night ; the whole people of dark hills  
A front of high impenetrable doom.  
But lo !  
Black in the blackness, is a yawn in the doom,  
And out of it flows the kind of man. Behold,  
It is a river, through the permission sent  
As through a snarling breakage in a cliff ;  
Turned like a hated thing away from God ;  
Spat out, the water of man's life, to spill  
Down bleak gullies, and thrird the gangways dark  
Through the reluctant hills, pouring as if  
It knew God were ashamed of it. And thence,

Rejected down the abhorring steeps, man's life  
 Is wasted in this country, set to run  
 A blind, ignorant, unremembered course,  
 Treading with hopeless feet of griev'd waters  
 Unending unblest spaces, the shameful road  
 Of dirt thickening into slime its flow,  
 An insane weather driving. For at the issue,  
 Hovering mightily fledge to beat it on,  
 A climate of demon's wings o'erarches man,  
 The hatred God has sent pursuing him.  
 Fierce hawking spirits wrong him, hungry Cold,  
 Crazes of Fear and sickening Want, and huge  
 Injurious Darkness, lord of the bad wings  
 That pester all the places beyond God,—  
 These at the door, with lust to embody themselves,  
 Wait for the naked journey of man's life  
 To seize it into ache, ravenously.  
 They never leave, down all its patient way,  
 To meddle with its waters, till they be sour  
 As venom, salt as weeping, foully ailing  
 With foreign evil,—all the sort of desires  
 Whoring the shuddering life unto their lust.  
 Behold man's river now ; it has travelled far  
 From that divine loathing, and it is made  
 One with the two main fiends, the Dark and Cold,  
 The faithful lovers of mankind. Behold,  
 Broad it is now become, a plenteous water,  
 A roomy tide. And lo, what oars are these ?  
 To sweet sung measure rows what happy fleet,  
 With at the lifted prows banners of flame,  
 Bravely scaring the darkness to betray  
 The black embarrasst flood sheared by the stems ?

Behold, at last God for man's misery  
Hath found excuse ! Behold his wretchedness  
Gilded at last with beauty pleasant to God !  
No longer a useless grief is man's life now ;  
For floating on it, for enjoying it,  
A state of barges goes, the state of kings.  
They bring a day with them of many lamps,  
And as they move, on the black slabbèd waters  
Red wounds, and green, and golden, do they shoot  
About them, beautiful cruelty of light ;  
And they throw music over the sounding river.  
I too am walking on the sea of man ;  
I watch your singing and your lamps row past ;  
And under me I hear the river speaking,  
The great blind water moaning to itself  
For sorrow it was made. But in your blithe ships  
Silverly chained with luxury of tune  
Your senses lie, in a delicious gaol  
Of harmony, hours of string'd enchantment.  
Or if you wake your ears for the river's voice,  
You hear the chime of fawning lipping water,  
Trodden to chattering falsehood by the keels  
Of kings' happiness. And what is it to you,  
When strangely shudders the fabric of your navy  
To feel the thrilling tide beneath it grieving ;  
Or when its timber drinks the river's mood,  
The mighty mood of man's Despair, which runs  
Like subtle electric blood through all the hulls,  
And tips each masthead with a glimmering candle  
Blue pale and flickering like a ghost ? For you  
Are too much lit to mark a corposant.  
Nor yours the stale smell of the unhealthful stream,

Clotted with mud and sullen with its weeds,  
 Who carry your own air with you, blest sweet  
 And drencht with many scattered fragrances.  
 You, sailing in golden ignorance, know not  
 The anxious flow of life under your way :  
 Do you not miss half the wonder of you ?—  
 That so your happiness in the thought of God  
 Stands, that he open'd man's expense of grief  
 To give your oars unscrupulous room, to be  
 The buoyancy of your delighted barges,  
 Sliding with fortunate lanterns and with tunes  
 And odorous holiday, O kings, O you  
 The pleasure of God, richly, joyously launcht  
 On this kind sea, the tame sorrow of Man ?  
 You need poets to reckon your marvellousness—

*Ahasuerus.*

Where is he driving ? I set thee not to this ;  
 It was to tell what I, not what they, be.

*Poet.*

How can they know what thou art, if not first  
 I tell them what they are themselves, my king ?

*Ahasuerus.*

Thou hast a night, man, not a week to tell them.  
 You men of words, dealers in breath, conceit  
 Too bravely of yourselves ;—O I know why  
 You love to make man's life a villainous thing,  
 And pose his happiness with heavy words.  
 You mean to puff your craft into a likeness

Of what hath been in the great days of the Gods.  
When Tiamat, the old foul worm from hell,  
Lay coiled and nested in the unmade world,  
All the loose stuff dragg'd with her rummaging tail  
And packt about her belly in a form,  
Where she could hutch herself and bark at Heaven,—  
The god's bright soldier, Bel, fashioned a wind ;  
And when her jaws began her whining rage  
Against him, into her guts he shot the wind  
And rent the membranes of her life. So you  
Wordmongers would be Bel to the life of man.  
You like not that his will should heap the world  
About him in a fumbled den of toil ;  
And set the strength of his spirit, not to joy,  
But to laborious money ; so you stand forth  
And think with spoken wind to make such stir  
And rumble in the inwards of man's life,  
That he in a noble colic will leap up  
Out of his cave of work and breathe sweet air.  
You will not do it : man prefers his den.  
Now leave mankind alone and sing of me.

*Poet.*

So ; I will tell thy glory now aright.  
I will not make it thy chief wonder, King,  
That thou hast tied the world upon a rack ;  
Or that thy armies be so huge, the earth  
Sways like a bridge of planks beneath their march,  
And leagues about their way out of the ground  
Like thunder comes the rumour of thy vengeance.  
These be but shows of kingship ; but one thing  
Exclaims, inevitably as a word

Announced by God, thee first of the world's souls,—  
That thou mayst have in thy arms Vashti the Queen.—  
Princes, what looks are these ?

Why are your minds astonisht so unwisely ?  
What, think you war the thing, or pompous fame ?  
See if I speak not truth of love and woman.

You will have heard how lightning's struck a man,  
Shepherd or wayfarer, and when they found  
The branded corpse, the rayment was torn off,  
Blown into tatters and strewn wide by that  
Withering death, and he birth-naked stretcht :  
Bethink you, is not that now very like  
How woman smites your souls ? Whatever dress  
Of thought you take to royalize your nature,—  
Gorgeous shawls of kingship, a world's fear,  
Or ample weavings of imagination,  
Or the spun light of wisdom,—like a gust  
Of flame, that weather of impersonal thought  
You strut beneath, that hanging storm of Love,  
Strikes down a terrible swift dazzling finger,  
Sight of some woman, on your clothèd hearts,  
And plucks the winding folly off, and leaves  
Bare nature there. And hear another likeness.  
Look, if the priests have made an altar-fire,  
They can have any flame they list, as gums  
Sprinkle the fuel, or salts, or curious earths,—  
Tawny or purple, green, scarlet, or blue,  
Or moted with an upward rain of sparks ;  
But first there must be air, or else no fire :  
Man's being is a fire lit unto God,  
And many thoughts colour the sacred flame ;  
But the air for him, the draught wherein he glows,

The breathing spirit that has turned mere life  
Into the hot vehement being of man  
Lambent upon the altar of the world,  
Is woman and desire of her, nought else.  
Behold, we know not what we do at all  
When we love women : is it we who love,  
Or Destiny rather visiting our souls  
In passion ?—How shall I name thee what thou art,  
Woman, thou dream of man's desire that God  
Caught out of man's first sleep and fashioned real ?  
Deliverance art thou from his own strait thought,  
Wind come from beyond the stars  
To blow away like mist all the disgrace  
Of reasonable bars,  
The forgery of time and place,  
Whereinto soul was narrowly brought  
When it was gridded close behind  
The workings of man's mind.  
But Woman comes to bless  
With an immoderateness,  
With a divine excess,  
Lust of life and yearn of flesh,  
Till there seems naught hindering our souls :  
Else we should crawl along the years  
Labour'd with measurable joys  
No greater than our life,  
Things carefully devised against tears ;  
And as snails harden their sweat  
To brittle safety, a carried shell,  
So we might build out of our woe of toil  
Serious delight.  
But to see and hear and touch Woman

Breaks our shell of this accursed world,  
 And turns our measured days to measureless gleam.  
 Up in a sudden burning flares  
 The dark tent of nature pitched about our souls ;  
 And light, like a stound of golden din,  
 A shadowless light like weather of infinite plains,  
 Light not narrowed into place,  
 Amazes the naked nerves of the soul ;  
 And like the pouring of immortal airs  
 Out of a flowery season,  
 Over us blows the inordinate desire.—

Ah, who from Hell did the wisdom bring  
 That would make life a formal thing ?  
 Who has invented all the manner and wont,  
 The customary ways,  
 That harness into evil scales  
 Of malady our living ?  
 But how they shrivel and craze  
 If love but glance on them !  
 And as a bowl of glass to shattering  
 Shivers at a sounding string,  
 The brittle glittering self of man  
 At beauty of Woman throbs apieces,  
 And seems into Eternity spilled  
 The being it contained.  
 Let it touch Woman and flesh becomes  
 Finer and more thrilled  
 Than air contrived in tune,  
 Lighter round the soul  
 Than flame is round burning.  
 She is God's bribery to man  
 That he the world endure,

His wage for carrying the weight of being.  
Nay, she is rather the eternal lure  
Out of form and things that end,  
Out of all the starry snares,  
Out of the trap of years,  
Into measureless desire ;  
Lest man be satisfied with mind,—  
Be never stung into self-hate  
At crouching always in the crate  
Of prudent knowledge round him wrought,  
And so grow small as his own thought.

Kings, think of the woman's body you love best :  
How the beloved lines twin and merge,  
Go into rhyme and differ, swerve and kiss,  
Relent to hollows or like yearning pout,—  
Curves that come to wondrous doubt  
Or smooth into simplicities ;  
Like a skill of married tunes  
Curdled out of the air ;  
How it is all sung delivering magic  
To your pent hamper'd souls !  
I tell you, kings, yours are but stammer'd songs  
To that enchantment fashion'd for him,  
That ceremony of life's powers,  
The loveliness of Vashti ;  
That unbelievable worship made  
For King Ahasuerus.  
He to whom the loveliest she is given,  
Least is bound to ended things,  
Belongeth most on earth to Heaven ;  
Hath the whitest wind of flame  
To burn his soul clean of the world,

Clean of mortal imaginings,  
 And back to the Beauty whence he came.  
 Now you hear the glory of the king of kings,  
 That he knows Vashti, that he lives  
 In this pleasure always.  
 Ah, could you see her ! But perhaps she is  
 Too fearful in her beauty for most men.  
 I think she would dismay you, and unhitch  
 The sinews from their purchase on your bones,  
 And have you spelled as a wizard spells his ghosts.  
 Yet 'twould be mercy so to harm your sense.  
 The truth does not more wonderfully walk,  
 Whose gestures are the stars, than in her ways  
 This queen's body sways.  
 And there is such language in her hair  
 As the sun's self doth talk.  
 King, let them see her ! lest they return unwise  
 Of thy true kingship, and among themselves  
 Imagine that they are even as thou,  
 Save in the height of throne. Let them perceive  
 That, having Vashti, there is none like thee :  
 Others are men ; but thou art he whose spirit  
 Is station'd in the beauty of the queen,  
 Whose flesh knows such amazement as before  
 Never beneath the lintels of man's sense  
 Came, an especial messenger from Heaven.

*Ahasuerus.*

Bring her ! let the Queen come crowned before us !  
 Slaves, fetch here all your light to shine upon  
 My Vashti's beauty ; let there be clear floor ;  
 Make the air worthy her with camphire lit

And frankincense ; and fill the hall with flames.  
 Then gaze, kings, and stare, hunger with your eyes  
 Upon her face ; but within brakes of fear  
 Fasten your wills, and move not from your seats.  
 Exult, you thron'd nations, that to your sight  
 She shall be lent, the pleasure of the king,  
 She whom to visit so inflames my soul,  
 That I can judge how God burns to enjoy  
 The beauty of the Wisdom that he made  
 And separated from himself to be  
 Wife to the divine act, mother of heavens.—  
 Let Vashti come and stand before the kings !

## III

## VASHTI AND THE KING'S WOMEN AT THEIR FEAST

*1st Woman.*

Queen, is it well to be so sorrowful ?

*2nd Woman.*

And when the King our lord spendeth on us  
 This festival out of his rich heart, to shoot  
 Thy looks upon us as thou wouldst rebuke us ?

*Vashti.*

Your pardon : do I trouble your greed ?

*1st Woman.*

Our greed ?

Rather our gratitude——

*2nd Woman.*

That we have share  
In these devices of the King's own cooks,  
These costly breads,—

*1st Woman.*

And these delicious meats,  
These sauces mixt of spicy treacle and balm.

*3rd Woman.*

And wines, purple and blue and like gold fire,  
Made of the colours of the morning sea  
And fragrance wild as woman's need of love.

*Vashti.*

Enjoy them then : who lets you ?

*3rd Woman.*

Thou dost, Queen.  
Thou sittest with hands folded in thy robe,  
And in the midst of delicacies wilt fast.

*1st Woman.*

We see thine eyes upon them as they were  
Wickedness.

*2nd Woman.*

'Tis rare bounty that we women  
Halve with the King his festival.

*3rd Woman.*

And thou,  
It seems, scarce findest it thankworthy.

*Vashti.*

Again,

Your pardon : but ye need not gaze on me.—  
And yet, why am I sorrowful ? In truth,  
Is it a sorrow that so leans upon me ?  
I know not. But my soul knoweth right well  
That I am watched.

*3rd Woman.*

Then in thy conscience, Queen,  
Thou feelest the King requiring thanks of thee.

*Vashti.*

Be careful of thy tongue,—and of the wine.—  
Who watches me ? Eyes are fixt on my soul,  
Eyes of desire. I think some great event  
Hath pusht its spirit forward of its time,  
To stand here quietly waiting, into my mind  
Inflicting its strange want of me, and ready  
To fetch my heart, and ready to take my hand  
And lead me away shrinking : is it Death ?  
It is some marvellous thing : for I know surely  
Behind it crowd out of their discipline  
The coming hours to watch me seized, and stare  
With questioning brows on me, and lift lean hands  
From under gowns of shadow to point me out  
One to another, saying : “ This is she :  
How will she bear it, think ye ? ”—Is it not cold ?  
Was there not wind just then ?—The flames are steady.

*1st Woman.*

No wind at all : the air's like one closed room.

*2nd Woman.*

There is no talk like this at the King's feast,  
I warrant. Were we not best be merry,  
And thank the King so for these wines and sweets ?

*Vashti.*

Yes, let us not forget our thankfulness ;  
For is not, sisters, everything we have  
Mere gift ?

*2nd Woman.*

My beauty pays for what I get.

*Vashti.*

I would, 'twere not so. .

*2nd Woman.*

Queen, I doubt thee not.

*Vashti.*

Pert little fool, where lies thy beauty, then ?  
Thou hast it not : its place is not thy flesh,  
But the delighting loins of men, there only.  
Thy beauty ! And thou knowest not that man  
Hath forged in his furnace of desire our beauty  
Into that chain of law which binds our lives—  
Man, please thyself, and woman, please thou man.  
But thou wilt have thy beauty pence, thou sayest ?  
And what's thy purchase ? Listen, I will tell thee :  
Just that thou art not whipt and drudged : the rest,  
All that thou hast beyond, is gift.

*2nd Woman.*

Why not ?

*Vashti.*

Truly, for thee, why not ?

*2nd Woman.*

Wouldst thou, 'twere yours ?

*1st Woman.*

Thou shudderest again ; what ails thee, Queen ?

*Vashti.*

I would have lived in beauty once.

*2nd Woman.*

In whose ?

*Vashti.*

I know the King finds relish in thy looks,  
Wench, and I have no care to grudge thy pride ;  
But when thy face is named throughout the world  
For wonder, I will bear thy impudence.

*1st Woman.*

But tell us, Queen, thy thought ; for we have made  
An end almost of eating ; and it seems  
It will be somewhat strange, pleasing our mood.

*Vashti.*

Strange you will find it doubtless ; but scarce pleasing,  
Unless 'tis pleasing to have news of danger.

Listen ! your lives are propt like a rotten house.  
 Your souls, that should have noble lodging here,  
 Have crept like peasants into huts that have  
 No force within their walls, but must be shored  
 With borrowed firmness. Yea, man's stubborn lust  
 To feed his heart upon your beauty, is all  
 The strength your lives have, all that holdeth you  
 Safe in the world,—propt like a rotten house.

*1st Woman.*

Shall woman then not love to have man's love ?

*3rd Woman.*

To feed his heart on us, thou sayest ? O yea !  
 And how can a woman know such might of living  
 As when upon her breast she feels the man,  
 The man of her desire, like sacrament  
 Feeding his heart, yea and his soul, on her ?

*Vashti.*

Are we for nought but so to nourish him ?

*3rd Woman.*

Thou art too proud, O Queen, too proud and lonely,  
 And goest apart to have thy thought too much.  
 'Tis known, too much thought dazes oft a mind,  
 Till it can learn nought of the signèd evil  
 God hath put in the faces of evil notions,  
 That spiritual sight may ken them coming  
 Sly and demure, and safely shut the brain  
 Ere they be in and swell themselves to lordship.

Hence is it that an evil thought in thee  
Hath dared so far, and played its wickedness  
Strangely within thee, braving even into speech.

*1st Woman.*

Strangely indeed thy brain's inhabited.  
What, is there aught prosperity for woman  
But to be shining in the thought of man ?

*Vashti.*

I wisht to prosper in the life I had,  
That the Gods might approve the flourishing  
Their heavenly graft of soul took from my flesh.  
Therefore I wisht to love. And I did love.—  
There came Ahasuerus conquering  
Into my father's land. My fancying hate  
Had made a man-beast of him, a thing, like man,  
Tall in his walk, but in the mood of his eyes  
A beast, and in the noise of his mouth a beast.  
He came, and lookt at me ; and, in a while,  
I saw that he was speaking to me there.  
And all the maiden went in me before him,  
Swifter than in a moon which looks against  
The morning, all the silver courage fails.—  
How cam'st thou to the King ?

*1st Woman.*

Sold to him, I.

*2nd Woman.*

Bought by him, I : for he had heard of me.

*Vashti.*

I also, sold or bought ; nay, rather paid :  
 Paid like cash to him, that as servant king  
 My father might have life, and a throne in life.  
 It mattered nothing then. [The QUEEN pauses.  
 Often in early summer, as I walkt  
 A girl singing her happiness, beside  
 The high green corn, holding all earth my own,  
 I saw, as my feet and my voice past by,  
 How in its hiding some croucht little beast  
 Startled, and filled a space of the gentle corn  
 With plunging quivering fear. And always then  
 My heart answer'd the fear that shook the corn,  
 With a sudden doubt in its beating ; for I knew  
 Within my life such rousing of dismay  
 I myself should watch, with scizing wonder.  
 It was so : in the midst of my new love,  
 That promist such a plenty in my soul,  
 At last some sleeping terror leapt awake,  
 And made the young growth shiver and wry about  
 Inwardly tormented. Yea, and my heart  
 It was, my heart in its hiding of green love,  
 That took so wildly the approaching sound  
 Of something strangely fearful walking near.

*3rd Woman.*

A queer tale, this.

*1st Woman.*

A spectre visited you ?

*Vashti.*

Indeed, a spectre.

*1st Woman.*

That have I never seen.

Was it the kind with nose and mouth grown sharp  
To an eagle's bill, and claws upon its fingers,  
The curve of them pasted with a bloody glue ?

*Vashti.*

The spectre was—my beauty.

*3rd Woman.*

It is as I said.

O Queen, send for a wise man in the morning ;  
And let him leech thy spirit.

*4th Woman.*

I've heard, the best

Riddance for evil notions in the mind,  
Is for a toad to sit upon the tongue ;  
While, breathed against the scalp, some power of spells  
Loosens the clasp the notion hath digg'd deep  
Into the soul ; so that it passeth down,  
Shaken and mastered, and creeps into the toad,——

*3rd Woman.*

Which gives a foolish kick or start to feel it,——

*4th Woman.*

Then the trapt notion may be easily burnt.

*Vashti.*

Yea ?—I think mine would not burn easily.  
With fire, with such indignant fire as pride

Yields, when it must destroy itself to feel  
 The power of the world touch it with humbling flame,—  
 With such a fire, whose heat you know not of,  
 Have I assayed this—*notion*, didst thou say ?  
 And it stood upright, with its shape unquencht,  
 And lived within the fire.

*3rd Woman.*

Thou hast it wrong.

*4th Woman.*

Thou hast not understood the cure we meant.

*2nd Woman.*

Stop brabbling, fools ; I would hear the Queen's mind.

*1st Woman.*

I too ; I hate a thing I cannot skill ;  
 And thee and all that lives in thee, O Queen,  
 I would keep friendly to my spirit ; yet  
 I do suspect something amazing in thee.

*Vashti.*

And if thou seest not how slippery  
 Is women's place in the world of men, 'tis like  
 Thou wilt amazedly the vision take, —  
 When I have led thee up my tower of thought.

*2nd Woman.*

How are we dangerous ? Are we not women,  
 Man's endless need ?

*Vashti.*

Ay, and therein the danger !

Is it not possible he hate the need ?

For not as he were a beast it urges him :

He is aware of it, he knows its force.—

The kind of beasts is in their blood alone,

But man is blood and spirit. And in him,

As in all creature, is the word from God,

“ Utter thyself in joy.”

*2nd Woman.*

And we his joy.

*Vashti.*

But such an one that may become, perhaps,  
Something not utterance, but strict commanding,

Yea, mastery, like the dancing in the blood

Of one bitten by spiders. And it is Spirit,

Spirit enjoying woman, that hath sent

A beating poison in the blood of man,

The poison which is lust. Spirit was given

To use life as a sense for ecstasy ;

Life mixt with Spirit must exult beyond

Sex-madden'd men and sex-serving women,

Into some rapture where sweet fleshly love

Is as the air wherein a music rings.

But blood hath captured Spirit ; Spirit hath given

The strength of its desire of joy to make

What ecstasy it may of woman's beauty,

And of this only, doing no more than train

The joys of blood to be more keen and cunning ;

As men have trained and tamed wild lives of the forests,  
 Breeding them to more excellent shape and size  
 And tireless speed, and to know the words of men.  
 So the wise masterful Spirit rules the joys  
 That come all fierce from roaming the dark blood ;  
 They are broken to his desire, they are wily for him,  
 A pack of lusts wherewith the Spirit hunts  
 Pleasure ; and the chief prey the pleasure hid  
 In woman.

*1st Woman.*

What joys are these ?

*Vashti.*

What joys ?

The joys of rutting beasts, tamed to endure,  
 Tamed to be always swift to answer Spirit,  
 Yet fiercer for their taming, wilder hungers ;  
 So that the Spirit, if he hunt them not,  
 Fears to be torn by them in mutiny.  
 Now know you woman's beauty ! 'Tis these joys,  
 The heat of the blood's desires, changed and mastered  
 By the desire of spirit, trained to serve  
 Spirit with lust, spirit with woman enjoy'd.

*2nd Woman.*

Queen, I am beautiful, and cannot boast  
 Thy subtle thinking ; and to one like me,  
 What matters whence come beauty, so I have it ?  
 Let it be but the witless mating of beasts,  
 Tamed and curiously knowing itself  
 And cunning in its own delight : What then ?  
 The nightingale desires his little lass,

And that brings out of his heart a radiant song ;  
A man desires a woman, and for song  
Out of his heart comes beauty, that like flame  
Reaches towards her, and covers her limbs with light.  
If it so please thee, say that neither loves  
Aught but his life's desire, fashioning it  
Adorably to marvellous song and beauty.  
What then ? Enough that the wonder lights on me,  
To me is paid the worship of the wonder.

*Vashti.*

O well I know how strong we are in man ;  
His senses have our beauty for their god,  
And his delight is built about us like  
Towering adoration, housing worship.—  
The spirit of man may dwell in God : the world,  
From the soft delicate floor of grass to those  
Rafters of light and hanging cloths of stars,  
Is but the honour in God's mind for man,  
Wrought into glorious imagination.  
But women dwell in man ; our temple is  
The honour of man's sensual ecstacy,  
Our safety the imagined sacredness  
Fashion'd about us, fashion'd of his pleasure.  
Beauty hath done this for us, and so made  
Woman a kind within the kind of man.  
Yea, there is more than this : a mighty need  
Hath man made of his woman in the world.  
Now man walks through his fate in fellowship  
Of two companion spirits ; ay, and these  
With double mastery go on with him.  
The one in black disgraceful weeds is Toil ;

She sows with never-ending gesture all  
 The path before his feet, cursing the way  
 She drags him on with growth of flouting crops,  
 Urchin thistles, and rank flourishing nettles.  
 But the other has a wear of woven gleam,  
 And with soft hand beseeches him his face  
 Away from the hardships of his hurt stung feet,  
 That with his eyes he may desire her looks :  
 And she is Beauty of Woman, man's dear blessing.  
 And if you would be wise, be well afraid  
 To think you have more office than to be  
 A sweet delicious while amid man's hours  
 Of worldly labour : we are too precious, so.  
 Yet see you not how this that Spirit hath done  
 Is also dangerous ?—For there are mightier needs !  
 There's no content for Spirit in the world  
 Till he has striven out of bounded fate,  
 And sent an infinite desire forth  
 Into the whole eternity of things.  
 Yea, spirit ails with loathing secretly  
 The irremediable force of being ;  
 Unless, with free expatiate desire,  
 He shape into the endless burning flux  
 Of starry world blindly adventuring  
 Some steady righteous destiny for Spirit :  
 Even as dreaming brain fashions the fume  
 Of life asleep to marshall'd imagery.  
 But we are in the way of this : and man,  
 The more he needs to announce upon the world,  
 Over him going like a storming air,  
 That fashioning word which utters the divine  
 Imagination working in him like anger ;

The more he finds his virtue caught and clogged  
In the fierce luxury he hath made of woman.  
Thence are we sin, thence deliciously  
Persuading man refuse his highest ardour.  
Too easily kindled was the ecstasy  
Of fleshly passion, with a joyous flame  
Too readily answering the Spirit's fire !  
He burns with us alone, so fragrantly  
His noblest vigour swoons delighted. Yea,  
Women, I tell you, not far now is man  
From hating us, so passionate the joy  
Of loving us, so mightily drawing down  
Into the service of his pleasure here  
All forces of his being. The pleasure soon  
Becomes a shame, scarce to be spoken aloud ;  
And in best minds, either detested doting  
Man's joy in woman's beauty will become ;  
Or a strict binding fire, holding him down  
In lust of beauty where no beauty is.

[*The KING'S MESSENGER comes in.*

*Messenger.*

To Vashti, to the Queen of the world, to her  
In whom the striving beauty of the world  
Hath made perfection, from the King I come.  
And the King bids me say, Rise from thy feast ;  
For thou must be to-night thyself a feast :  
The vision of thy loveliness must now  
Feed with astonishment my vassals' hearts.  
Therefore thou art to come,

*Vashti.*

And tell the King

I will not come.

*Messenger.*

What was there in my words  
Thou dost not understand ?—I say, the King  
Would show thy beauty to his under-kings,  
That with this also they may be amazed  
And utterly fear his fortune.

*Vashti.*

So. Go back,

Tell the King I have hearkened to his message,  
And tell him I will not come.

*Messenger.*

What sickness shall I say has lighted on thee,  
So that thou canst not come ?

*Vashti.*

Thou weariest me.

Say this to the King, Vashti will not come.  
Are they not plain, my words ? Canst thou not learn  
them ?

*Messenger.*

Give me some softer speech. Must I not fear  
I shall earn whipping if I take these words ?

*Vashti.*

I pray thee, go. Thou art a trouble here ;  
Seest thou not how all these feasting women

Pause, and the pleasure is distrest in them ?  
Thou hast thy message : say, She will not come.—  
Back to the King, now !

*Messenger.*

I am whipt for this.

[*He goes.*]

*Vashti.*

It seems, my sisters, we have changed our moods.  
But now, my mind was heavy, you were blithe ;  
And in a moment, you, behold, are fixt  
Gazing like desperate things, while I rejoice.

*1st Woman.*

Rejoice ! thou dost rejoice ? then madness does.

*Vashti.*

I know not that : but certainly I know  
A mind, that has been feeling for long time  
The greatness of some hovering event  
Poised over life, will rejoice marvellously  
When the event falls, suddenly seizing life :  
Like faintness when a thunderstorm comes down,  
That turns to exulting when the lightning flares,  
Shattering houses, making men afraid.  
And this is my event : I am its choice.  
Yea, not as a storm, but as an eagle now  
It stoops on me ; and, though I am its prey,  
I am lifted by majestic wings, my soul  
Is clothed in swiftness of a mighty soaring.

*3rd Woman.*

What glory can her wondrous eyes behold ?

*4th Woman.*

Seemeth her flesh to glow ! and her throat pants  
As one who feels a god within her, come  
Out of his heaven to enjoy her.

*2nd Woman.*

Ay,

Now it is true, the Queen is beautiful ;  
She could, so looking, enrage love in one  
Whose blood a hundred years had frozen dry.

*1st Woman.*

Ah, but I fear thee, Queen : this dreadful mood  
Will break the pleasantness of friendship thou  
Hast kept for me, as a ship in a gale is broken.

*Vashti.*

Ay, very like : and the event will rouse  
Such work in the water where your comfort sails,  
More than my fortune will to pieces blow ;  
You too I think will get some perilous tossing  
From what proves my destruction.

*2nd Woman.*

And, so knowing,  
For mere insane delight in violent things,  
Wilt thou awake in the fickle mood of men

Again that ancient ignominy which once,  
Till beauty freed them, loaded the souls of women ?

*3rd Woman.*

Truly, long time will work what now thou doest.

*Vashti.*

I know not rightly what I here begin ;  
No more than one, who stands in midst of wind  
On a tall mountain, knows what breaking down  
The earth must have ere the wind's speed is done,  
And it hath drawn out of the drenched soil  
The clinging vapours, and made bright the air.

*2nd Woman.*

But we'll not have thee disobedient.  
The King's mind is a summer over us ;  
Thou with a storm wilt fill him, and the hail  
That shatters thee will leave us bruised and weeping.

*Vashti.*

Be sulky in his arms : the weather soon  
Will pleasantly favour thee again.

*4th Woman.*

No, no ;  
Not because from our heaven of man's mind  
Thou wilt bring down on us a rain of scorn,  
But because thou art wicked, thou must go  
And tell the King the wine was rash in thee.

*Vashti.*

I must !

*3rd Woman.*

Thou must indeed : words such as thine  
Never were impudent in men's ears before.

*2nd Woman.*

We will not have thee disobedient.

*1st Woman.*

Here comes another : gentle words, my Queen,  
Let him take from thee now, and swiftly follow  
Contrite, and let the beauty of thy grief  
Bend pleading against the King's furious eyes.

*[The POET comes in, and kneels.]*

*Poet.*

I will not ask thee what strange anger sent  
That blaze of proud contempt in the King's face :  
But ere the voice of the King seals up thy life  
In an unalterable judgment, I  
Am granted now to come as his last message :  
And, as I will, to speak. Here then I am  
Not as commanding, but on my knees beseeching,  
And for myself beseeching.

*Vashti.*

What hast thou  
To do with this ? and wherefore wert thou chosen ?

*Poet.*

I was to praise the splendour of the King ;  
And I made thee his splendour ; and the King,  
Knowing my truth, would have thee brought, to break  
All the pride of his under-kings, already  
Desperate with his riches, and now seeing  
What marvellous fortune also hath his love,  
How marvellously delighted.

*Vashti.*

Get thee back :  
And tell the King 'tis time his judgment fell.

*Poet.*

Not till thou hearest me.

*Vashti.*

I will not hear thee.  
Wouldst thou go on before me, and say, Look,  
This is the woman which I told you of,  
You kings ; does she not, as I said, stir up  
Quaking desire through all your muscles ? Look,  
And thank the King for showing you his lust !—  
I will not hear thee.

*Poet.*

Dost thou not know, my Queen,  
That, when I taught thee songs, thou taughtest me  
The divine secret, Beauty ? My small tunes  
Were games to thee ; but now I am he who knows  
How man may walk upon Eternity

Wearing the world as a god wears his power,  
 The world upon him as a burning garment ;  
 For I am he whose spirit knoweth beauty,—  
 And thou art the knowledge, Queen ! Therefore thou  
       must

Come with me to the kings of all the nations ;  
 For the whole earth must know of thee. These kings,  
 Though it be but a lightning-moment struck  
 Upon the darkness of their ignorant hearts,  
 Must know what I know ; that there is a beauty,  
 Only in thee shown forth in bodily sign,  
 Which can of life make such triumphant glee,  
 The force of the world seems but man's spirit utter'd.

*Vashti.*

And what am I to know ?—This must, no doubt,  
 Content me, that we are as wine, and men  
 By us have senses drunk against his toil  
 Of knowing himself, for all his boasting mind,  
 Caught by the quiet purpose of the world,  
 Burnt up by it at last, like something fallen  
 In molten iron streaming. But I know  
 Not drunken may man's soul master his world ;  
 And I now make for woman a new mood,  
 Wherein she will not bear to know herself  
 A heady drug for man.—I will not come.

*Poet.*

I, who have brought thy insult on the King,  
 Will scarce escape his judgment. But not this  
 My pleading. Seest thou not how wonderfully  
 The mean affairs of living fill with gleam,

Like pools of water lying in the sun,  
Because above men's minds renown of thee,  
The certain knowledge of beauty, now presides ?  
It must not be that thou, for a whim of scorn,  
Wilt let thyself be made unseen, unheard of.  
Beauty is known in thee ; but, without thee,  
It is a rumour buzzing hardly heard.  
And without beauty men are scurrying ants,  
Rapid in endless purpose unenjoyed ;  
Or newts in holes under the banks of ponds,  
Feeding and breeding without sound or light.  
For the one thing that is the god in man  
Is a delight that admirably knows  
Itself delighted ; and it is but beauty.  
And thou art beauty known.

*Vashti.*

Truly, I say,  
I know not how to bear it ; that for you  
To feel yourselves, though in the depth of the world,  
Dizzy, and thence as if clate on high,  
We women are devised like drunkenness.  
And what are we to make of ourselves here,  
When in the joy of us you think the world  
No more than your spirits crying out for joy ?  
Is this your love, to dream a god of man,  
And women to keep as wine to make you dream ?—  
Now, back ! or the eunuchs handle thee.

*[He goes.]*

*Vashti.*

You will not hear of me after this night,  
And thus I say farewell. It may be, far

In time not yet appointed, our life's spirit  
 Will know its fate, through all the thickets of grief,  
 As simply and as gladly as one's eyes  
 Greet the blue weather shining behind trees.  
 Yea, and I think there will be more than this :  
 Is not the world a terrible thing, a vision  
 Of fierce divinity that cares not for us ?  
 Do we not seem immortal good desire,  
 Mortally wronged by capture in swift being  
 Made of a world that holds us firm for ever ?  
 And yet is it not beautiful, the world ?  
 How read you that ? How is our wrong delightful ?  
 Thus it is : Spirit finding the world fair,  
 Is spirit in dim perception of its own  
 Radiant desire piercing the worldly shadow.  
 But what is dim will become glorious clear :  
 All in a splendour will the Spirit at last  
 Stand in the world, for all will be naught else  
 But Spirit's own perfect knowledge of itself ;  
 Yea, this dark mighty seeming of the world  
 Is but the Spirit's own power unsubdued ;  
 And as the unruled vigours of thought in sleep  
 Crowd on the brain, and become dream therein ;  
 So the strange outer forces of man's spirit  
 Are the appearing world. But all at last,  
 Subdued, becomes self-knowing ecstasy,  
 The whole world brightens into Spirit's desire.  
 This is for Spirit to be lord of life ;  
 And man, with foolish hope looking for this,  
 Takes the ravishing drunkenness he hath  
 From us, for knowledge of the Spirit's power.  
 But it will come by love. It will be twain

Who go together to this height of mastery  
 Over the world, governing it as song  
 Is govern'd by the heart of him who sings ;  
 But never one by means of one shall reach it :  
 Not man alone, nor woman alone, but each  
 Enabling each, together, twain in one.

[*The KING'S MESSENGER comes in.*

*Messenger.*

I speak to the rebellious woman Vashti.  
 Thou art no more a Queen ; thou hast no place  
 In the King's house, nor in the life of men :  
 Thus art thou judged. Go forth now ; let the night  
 Befriend thee, for no other friend thou hast,  
 For the day shall reveal thee to men's eyes,  
 And they, obedient to the King, will hate thee.  
 Therefore be gone : and as the beasts have homes  
 In the wild ground, have thy home from henceforth.

*Vashti.*

Gives the King reason for this judgment ?

*Messenger.*

Yea ;

Because thou art a danger to all marriage,  
 Because men are dishonoured in their rule  
 Of women by thy insult, thou art judged.

*2nd Woman.*

But if the King had heard her crazy words  
 He would have put her where they tame with thongs  
 Maniacs.

*4th Woman.*

When the King hath slept, we will  
 To-morrow crave his presence, and will stand  
 In humble troop before him, thanking him  
 For that his virtue hath this wicked woman  
 Purged from among us, saved us from infection.

*1st Woman.*

Alas, my Queen ! where lies thy journey now ?

*Vashti.*

Ay, where to go ? What shelter for me now  
 Will any of the dwelt earth dare to give ?  
 My beauty as a branding now will mark me ;  
 And shame will run before me, and await  
 My coming, wheresoever I would lodge.  
 For out of Shushan to the ends of the earth  
 Great news runs, with a hidden soundless speed  
 Through secret channels in the folks' dim mind,  
 As water races through smooth sloping gutters.  
 Swifter than any feet could bear the tale,  
 Going unheard, already posts abroad  
 A buried river, and will soon burst up  
 In towns and markets, far as the width of day,  
 A bubbling clamour, wonderful wild news :  
 " Vashti the Queen is judged and forced to go  
 Roaming the earth, outcast and infamous ;  
 Look out for her ! Be ready, if she comes,  
 With stones and hooting voices !"—Fare you well,  
 Women whom once I knew. You are quit of me :  
 Pardon me if I add, And I of you.

## IV

Into the darkness fared the outcast Queen ;  
Fearless her face, and searching with proud gaze  
The impenetrable hour. Behind her burned  
The sky, held by the open kiln of the town  
In a great breath of fire, yellow and red,  
From out the festival streets, and myriad links.  
Still might she taste, and still must choke to taste,  
The fragrance of sweet oils and gums aflame  
Capturing the cool night with spicy riches ;  
Still after her through the hollow moveless air  
The sounded ceremonies came, the cry  
Of dainty lust in winding tune of fifes,  
The silver fury of cymbals clamouring  
Like frenzy in a woman-madden'd brain ;  
And drumming underneath the whole wild noise,  
Like monstrous hatred underneath desire,  
The thunder of the beaten serpent-skins.  
Yea, in the town behind her, flaring Shushan,  
She heard Man, meaning to adore himself,  
Throned on the wealth of earth as God in heaven,  
And making music of his glorying thought,  
Merely betray the mastery of his blood,  
His sexual heart, his main idolatry,—  
Woman, and his lust to devour her beauty,  
Himself devoured ceaselessly by her beauty.  
And well she knew, to herself bitterly smiling,  
How the King seated amid his fellow-kings  
Devised his grievous rage, feeling himself  
Insulted in his dearest mind, his rule

Over the precious pleasure of his women  
Wounded : how the man's wrath would hiss and swell  
Like gross spittle spat into red-hot coals.

But as the Queen fared through the blinded hour,  
Sudden against the darkness of her eyes  
There came a wind of light. Crimson it was,  
With smoky lightnings braided, in its first  
Swift surge into the gloom before her face ;  
But it began to golden, and became  
Astonishingly white. And as she stood  
With rigour in her nerves, a mighty shudder  
Ravisht the light, and in the midst appeared  
Vision, a goddess, terrible and kind ;  
And to the Queen the goddess spoke, in voice  
That healed her anger with its quietness.

*Ishtar.*

I am the goddess Ishtar, and thou art  
My servant. Wilt thou any help of me ?

*Vashti.*

Am I then one whom gods may help ? I am  
By men judged hateful : surely I am thereby  
Made over to the demons, and not thine.

*Ishtar.*

Yet art thou mine, because thou knowest well  
Thou disobeyest me.

*Vashti.*

How do I so ?

*Ishtar.*

I am the goddess of the power of women,  
And passion in the hearts of men is my  
Divinity.

*Vashti.*

Yea, then I disobey thee.

*Ishtar.*

And yet thou shalt not fear me wronging thee :  
Tell me, O thou Despair, whither thou goest ?

*Vashti.*

Thy taunt goes past me ; I am not despair.

*Ishtar.*

Verily, but thou art. Is not thy mind  
A hot revolter from the service due  
To my divinity, passion in men's hearts ?  
Is there aught else that thou mayst serve ? Thou  
knowest  
There is naught else : therefore thou art Despair.

*Vashti.*

That I am infamous, I know. But even now,  
Now when I learn I am to gods no more  
Than to the lust of men, I will not be  
Despair.

*Ishtar.*

Who means so greatly to serve pride,  
That the service of the world is a thing loath'd,

Is desperate, avoided by mankind,  
 Unpleasing to the gods. We, who look down,  
 Know that the world and pride may both be served.  
 Yet also that it was too hard for thee  
 We know, and pardon. Thou shalt tell me now  
 Why thou refusest the life given thee.

*Vashti.*

Because I will not woman should be sin  
 Amid man's life. You gods have given man  
 Desire that too much knows itself ; and thence  
 He is all confounded by the pleasure of us.  
 How sweetly doth the heart of man begin  
 Desiring us, how like music and the green  
 First happiness of the year ! But this can grow  
 To uncontrollably crowding lust, beyond  
 All power of delight to utter, thence  
 Inwardly turned to anger and detesting !  
 Till, looking on us with strange eyes, man finds  
 We are not his desire : it was but sex  
 Inflamed, so that it roused the breaking forth  
 Of secret fury in him, consuming life,  
 Yea, even the life that would reach up to know  
 The heaven of gods above it.

*Ishtar.*

And what, for this,

Dost thou refuse ?

*Vashti.*

I refuse woman's beauty !  
 Not merely to be feasting with delight  
 Man's senses, I refuse ; but even his heart

I will not serve. Are we to be for ever  
Love's passion in man, and never love itself ?  
Always the instrument, never the music ?

*Ishtar.*

I have not done with man.—Thou sayest true,  
Women are as a sin in life : for that  
The gods have made mankind in double sex.  
Sin of desiring woman is to be  
The knowledgeable light within man's soul,  
Whereby he kills the darken'd ache of being.  
But shall I leave him there ? or shall I leave  
Woman amid these hungers ? Nay : I hold  
The rages of these fires as a soft clay  
Obedient to my handling ; there shall be  
Of man desiring, and of woman desired,  
A single ecstasy divinely formed,  
Two souls knowing themselves as one amazement.  
All that thou hatest to arouse in man  
Prepareth him for this ; and thou thyself  
Art by thy very hate prepared : wherefore  
The gods forgive thee, seeing what comes of thee.  
Behold now ! of my godhead I will make  
Thy senses burn with vision, storying  
The spirit of woman growing from loved to love.

*The First Vision : Helen.*

Helen am I, a name astonishing  
The world, a fame that rings against the sky,  
Like an alarm of brass smitten to sound  
The news of war against the stone of mountains.

I move in power through the minds of men,  
 And have no power to hold my power back.  
 Men's passions fawn upon my feet, as waves  
 That fiercely fawn after the going wind ;  
 But not as the wind, shaking off the foam  
 Of the pursuing lust of the moaning waves,  
 And over the clamour of the evil seas'  
 Monstrous word running lightly, unhurt.  
 They fawn upon me, all the lusts of the world,  
 Bewildering my steps with straining close,  
 And breathe their horrible spittle against me.  
 Passions cry round me with the yelling cry  
 Of dogs chained and starving and smelling blood.  
 Yea, for through me the world becomes a den  
 Of insane greed. In helpless beauty I stand  
 Alone in the midst of dreadful adoration ;  
 And, round me thronged, the fawning, fawning lusts  
 Open their throats upon me and whine and lick  
 My feet with dripping tongues, or gaze to pant  
 Hot hunger in my face. For I am made  
 To set their hearts grim to possess my life,  
 And with an anger of love devour my beauty ;  
 And yet to seal up in their mastered hearts  
 The rage, and bring them in croucht worship down  
 Before me, bent with impotent desire.  
 A quiet place the world was ere I came  
 A strife, a dream of fire, into its sleep ;—  
 And with their senses ended men's delights.  
 But I struck through their senses burning news  
 Of impossible endless things, and mixt  
 Wild lightning into their room of darkness.—Then  
 Agony, and a craving for delight

Escaping sensual grasp, began in men ;  
And the agony was poison in the health  
Of sweet desire.—The joy of me men tried  
To compass with strange frenzy and desire  
Made new with cunning. But still at my feet  
The lusts they tarr on me crouch down and fawn  
And snarl to be so fearful of their prey.  
I see men's faces grin with helpless lust  
About me ; crooked hands reach out to please  
Their hot nerves with the flower of my skin ;  
I see the eyes imagining enjoyment,  
The arms twitching to seize me, and the minds  
Inflamed like the glee-kindled hearts of fiends.  
And through the world the fawning, fawning lusts  
Hound me with worship of a ravenous yearning :  
And I am weary of maddening men with beauty.

*The Second Vision : Sappho.*

Into how fair a fortune hath man's life  
Fallen out of the darkness !—This bright earth  
Maketh my heart to falter ; yea, my spirit  
Bends and bows down in the delight of vision,  
Caught by the force of beauty, swayed about  
Like seaweed moved by the deep winds of water :  
For it is all the news of love to me.  
Through paths pine-fragrant, where the shaded ground  
Is strewn with fruits of scarlet husk, I come,  
As if through maidenhood's uncertainty,  
Its darkness coloured with strange untried thoughts ;  
Hither I come, here to the flowery peak  
Of this white cliff, high up in golden air,  
Where glowing earth and sea and divine light

Are in mine eyes like ardour, and like love  
 Are in my soul : love's glowing gentleness,  
 The sunny grass of meadows and the trees,  
 Towers of dark green flame, and that white town  
 Where from the hearths, a fragrance of burnt wood,  
 Blue-purple smoke creeps like a stain of wine  
 Along the paved blue sea : yea, all this kindness  
 Lies amid salt immeasurable flowing,  
 The power of the sea, passion of love.  
 I, Sappho, have made love the mastery  
 Most sacred over man ; but I have made it  
 A safety of things gloriously known,  
 To house his spirit from the darkness blowing  
 Out of the vast unknown : from me he hath  
 The wilful mind to make his fortune fair.  
 Yea, here I stand for the whole earth to see  
 How life, breathing its fortune like sweet air,  
 Mixing it with the kindled heart of man,  
 May utter it proud against the double truth  
 Of darkness fronting him and following him,  
 In a prevailing, burning, marvellous lie !  
 And it is love kindles the burning of it,  
 The quivering flame of spoken-forth desire,  
 Which man hath made his place within the world,—  
 Love, learnt of Sappho ! and not only bright  
 With gladness : I have devised an endless pain,  
 The fearful spiritual pain of love, to hold  
 In a firm fire, unalterably bright,  
 The shining forth of Spirit's imagination  
 Declared against the investing dark, a light  
 Of pain and joy, equal for man and woman.

*The Third Vision : Theresa.*

! Come, golden bridegroom, break this mortal night,  
Five times chained with darkness of my senses.  
At last now visit my desire, and turn  
Thy feet, and the flaming path of thy feet,  
Unto these walls lockt round me like a death.  
Death I would have them till thou comest ; yea,  
The earthly stone whereof man's fortune here  
Is made, strongly into deliberate death  
I have built about my soul, to fend its life  
From gazes of the world. I am too proud  
To endure the world's desire of my beauty ;  
I know myself too marvellous in love  
To be the joy of aught that thou hast made :  
I am to be bride of thee, of the world's maker.  
O God, the heart I have from thee, the heart  
Uttering itself in an endless word of love,  
Is sealed up in the stone of worldly night :  
Set hitherward the flaming way of thy feet,  
Break my night, and enter in unto me.  
Come, wed my spirit ; and like as the sea,  
Into the shining spousal ecstasy  
Of sun and wind, riseth in cloudy gleam,  
So let the knowing of my flesh be clouds  
Of fire, mounting up the height of my spirit,  
Fire clouding with flame the marriage hour  
Wherein my spirit keeps thy dreadful light  
Away from Heaven in a bridal kiss,—  
Fire of bodily sense in spiritual glee  
Held, as fire of water in sunlit air.  
Ah God, beautiful God, my soul is wild

With love of thee. Hitherward turn thy feet,  
 Turn their golden journeying towards this night,—  
 This night of cavernous earth ; and now let shine  
 These walls of stone, against thy nearing love,  
 Like pure glass smitten by the power of the sun ;  
 And let them be, in thy descending love,  
 Like glass in a furnace, falling molten down,  
 Back from thy burning feet streaming and flowing,  
 Leaving me naked to thy bright desire.—  
 Enjoy me, God, enjoy thy bride to-night.

*Vashti.*

Too well I know the first, the scarlet clad ;  
 And she, that was in shining white and gold,  
 Was as the sound of bees and waters, at last  
 Heard by one long closed in the dins of madness.  
 But what was she, the black-robed, with the eyes  
 So fearfully alight, the last who spoke ?

*Ishtar.*

Take none of these for perfect : they are moods  
 Purifying my women to become  
 My unexpressive, uttermost intent.—  
 As music binds into a strict delight  
 The manifold random sounds that shake the air,  
 Even so fashioned must I have the being  
 That fills with rushing power the boundless spirit :  
 Amidst it, musically firm, a joy  
 That is a fiery knowledge of itself,  
 Thereby self-continent, a globèd fire.  
 And she who gave thee wonder, is the sign  
 Of those who firmest, brightest hold their being

Fastened and seized in one enjoyed desire.  
Yet even they are but a making ready  
For what I perfectly intend : in them  
Joy of self-bound desire hath burnt itself  
To extreme purity ; I am free thereby  
To work my meaning through them, my divinity.  
Yea, such clean fire in man and such in woman  
To mingle wonderfully, that the twain  
Become a moment of one blazing flame  
Infinitely upward towering, far beyond  
The boundless fate of spirit in the world.  
But in the way to this are maladies  
And anguish ; and as a perilous bridge  
Over the uncontrolled demanding world,  
Virginity, passionate self-possessing,  
Must build itself supreme, unbreakable.  
——I leave thee : as thou mayst, be comforted  
By prophecy of what I mean in life.  
Against thee is not Heaven ; and thou must  
Endure the hatred men will throw upon thee.

. . . . .

The shining place where Ishtar looked at her  
Empty the Queen beheld ; and into mist  
The glory faded, and the stars came through  
Untroubled. Into the night the Queen went on.

**PART II**  
**IMPERFECTION**



## MARY

[A LEGEND OF THE FORTY-FIVE]

### I

*A street in Carlisle leading to the Scottish Gate. Three girls, MARY, KATRINA, and JEAN.*

*Katrina.*

What a year this has been !

*Mary.*

There's many a lass  
Will blench to hear the date of it—Forty-five,—  
Poor souls ! Why will the men be fighting so,  
Running away to find out death, as if  
It were some tavern full of light and fiddling ?  
And when the doors are shut, what of the girls  
Who gave themselves away, and still must live ?  
Are not men thoughtless ?

*Katrina.*

Leaving only kisses  
To be remembered by.

*Jean.*

That's not so bad  
As when the dead lads went beyond kissing.

*Mary.*

Poor souls ! Well, Carlisle has at least three hearts  
That are not crying for a lad who's gone  
Listening to the lean old Crowder, Death.  
We needn't mope : and yet it's sad.

*Jean.*

Come on,

Why are we dawdling ? All the heads are up,  
Steepled on spikes above the Scottish Gate,—  
Some of the rebels rarely handsome too.

*Mary.*

Won't it be rather horrible ?

*Katrina.*

A row  
Of chopt-off heads sitting on spikes—ugh !

*Jean.*

Yes,  
And I daresay blood dribbling here and there.

*Mary.*

Don't, Jean ! I am going back. I was  
 Forbid the gate.

*Katrina.*

And so was I.

*Jean.*

And I.

*Katrina.*

But a mere peep at them ?

*Jean.*

Yes, come on, Mary.

*Mary.*

We might just see how horrible they are.

*Jean.*

Sure, they will make us shudder ;

*Katrina.*

Or else cry.

[A MAN meets them.]

*Man.*

Are you for the show, my girls ?

*Jean.*

We aren't your girls.

*Katrina.*

Do you mean the heads upon the Scottish Gate ?

*Man.*

Ay, that's the show, a pretty one.

*Jean.*

Are all

The rebels' heads set up ?

*Man.*

All, all ; their cause

Is fallen flat ; but go you on and see

How wonderly their proud heads are elate.

*Katrina.*

Do any look as if they died afeared ?

*Man.*

Go and learn that yourselves. And when you mark  
How grimly addled all the daring is

Now in those brains, do as your hearts shall bid you,  
And that is weep, I hope.

*Mary.*

O let's go back.

*Jean.*

We have no friends spiked on the Scottish Gate.

*Man.*

No ? Well, there's quite a quire of voices there,  
Blessing the King's just wisdom for his stern  
Strong policy with the rebels.

*Mary.*

Who are those ?—

I think it's fiendish to have killed so many.

*Man.*

The chattering birds, my lass, and droning flies :  
They're proper Whigs, are birds and flies,—or else  
The Whigs are proper crows and carrion-bugs.

*[He goes on past them.]*

*Katrina.*

A Jacobite ?

*Jean.*

That's it, I warrant you.  
One of the stay-at-homes.

*Mary.*

Now promise me,  
We'll only take a glimpse, girls, a short glimpse.

*Jean (laughing).*

Yes, just to see how horrible they are.

*[They go on towards the gate.]*

## II

*The Scottish Gate, Carlisle. Among the crowd.*

*Mary.*

O why did we come here ?

*Jean.*

One, two, three, four—  
A devil's dozen of them at the least.

*Katrina.*

Poor lads ! They did not need to set them up  
So high, surely. Which is the one you'd call  
Prettiest, Jean ?

*Jean.*

That fellow with the sneer ;  
The axe's weight could not ruffle his brow,—  
How signed it is with scorn !

*Katrina.*

Ah yes, he's dark  
And you are red : Mary and I will choose  
Some golden fellow. Which do you think, Mary ?

*Jean.*

O, but mine is the one ! Look—do you see ?—  
He must have put his curls away from the axe ;  
Or did they part themselves when he knelt down,  
And let the stroke have his nape white and bare ?  
O could a girl not nestle snug and happy  
Against a neck, with such hair covering her !

*Katrina.*

Now, Mary, we must make our yellow choice ;  
You've got good eyes ; which do you fancy ?—Jean !  
What ails her ?

*Jean.*

How she stares ! which is the one  
She singles out ? That topmost boy it is,—  
Pretty enough for a flaxen poll indeed.  
Is that your lad, Mary ?

*Katrina.*

She's ill or fey ;

They are too much for her ; and I truly  
Am nearly weeping for them and their wives and lasses.  
Her eyes don't budge ! She's fastened on his face  
With just the look that one would have to greet  
The ghost of one's own self. See, all her blood  
Is trapt in her heart,—pale she is as he.

*A Man in the Crowd.*

Can't you see she's fainting ? 'Tis no sight  
For halfling girls.

*Jean.*

Halfling yourself.

*Katrina.*

Mary !

*Mary.*

Let us go home now : help me there, Katrina.

*Katrina.*

Yes, dear, but are you ill ?

*Mary.*

No : let us go home.

*Katrina (to Jean).*

Come, Jean. Did you not hear her gasp ? We must  
Be with her on her way home.

*Jean.*

You go then.

I've not lookt half enough at these. Besides——

[MARY and KATRINA go.]

Well, sir, how dare you speak to girls like that,  
When they're alone ?

*The Man.*

You needn't be so short ;  
I guess you're one to take fine care of yourself.

*Jean.*

Yes, and I'd choose a better-looking man  
Than you, my chap, if I wanted company.

*The Man.*

Come this way, you'll see better.

*Jean.*

Impudence !

Who said your arm might be there ?

*The Man.*

O, it's all right.

*Jean.*

And what do you think of the rebels now they're dead ?

### III

*Mary lying awake in bed.*

O let me reason it out calmly ! Have I  
No stars to take me through this terror, poured  
Suddenly, dreadfully, on to my heart and spirit ?  
Why is it I, of all the world I only  
Who must so love against nature ? I knew  
Always, that not like harbour for a boat,

Not a smooth safety, Love would take my soul ;  
But like going naked and empty-handed  
Into the glitter and hiss of a wild sword-play,  
I should fall in love, and in fear and danger :  
But a danger of white light, a fear of sharpness  
Keen and close to my heart, not as it proves,—  
My heart hit by a great dull mace of terror !

. . . . .

So it has come to me, my hope, my wonder !  
Now I perceive that I was one of those  
Who, till love comes, have breath and beating blood  
In one continual question. All the beauty  
My happy senses took till now has been  
Drugg'd with a fiery want and discontent,  
That settled in my soul and lay there burning.  
The hills, wearing their green ample dresses  
Right in the sky's blue courts, with swerving folds  
Along the rigour of their stony sinews—  
(Often they garr'd my breath catch and stumble),—  
The moon that through white ghost of water went,  
Till she was ring'd about with an amber window,—  
The summer stars seen winking through dusk leaves ;  
All the earth's manners and most loveliness,  
All made my asking spirit stir within me,  
And throb with a question, whose answer is,  
(As now I know, but then I did not know)  
There is a Man somewhere meant for me.—  
And I have seen the face of him for whom  
My soul was made !

Ah, somewhere ? Where is that ?

Have I not dreamt that he is gone away,

Gone ere he loved me ? Now I lose myself.  
I only have seen my boy's murder'd head.

. . . . .

Yes, again light breaks through and quells my thought.  
The whole earth seemed as it belonged to me,  
A message spoken out in green and blue  
Specially to my heart ; and it would say  
That some time, out of the human multitude  
A face would look into my soul, and sign  
All my nature, easily as it were wax,  
With its dear image ; but after that impress  
I would all harden, so that nought could raze  
The minting of that seal from off my being.  
And yesterday it fell. An idle whim  
To see the rebels on the Scottish Gate,—  
And there was the face of him I was made to love,  
There,—ah God,—on the gate, my murder'd lad !  
Did any girl have first-sight love like this ?  
Not to have ever seen him, only seen  
Such pitcous token that he has been born,  
Lived and grown up to beauty, the man who was meant  
To sleep upon my breast, and dead before  
The sweet custom of love could be between us !  
To have but seen his face ?—Is that enough  
To make me clear he is my man indeed ?  
Why, sure there are tales bordering on my lot  
In misery ?—Of hearts who have been stabbed  
By knowledge that their mates were in the earth,  
Yet never could come near enough to be healed ;  
Of those who have gone longing all a life,  
Because a voice heard singing or a gesture

Seen from afar gossell'd them of love ;  
And no more than the mere announcement had.  
Ah, but all these to mine were kindly dealing ;  
For not till they'd trepann'd him out of life  
Did he, poor laggard, come to claim my soul.—  
O my love, but your ears played you falsely  
When they were taken by Death's wily tunes !

. . . . .

Am I so hardly done to, who have seen  
My lover's face, been near enough to worship  
The very writing of his spirit in flesh ?  
For having that in my ken, I am not far  
From loving with my eyes all his body.  
What a set would his shoulders have, and neck,  
To bear his goodly-purposed head ; what gait  
And usage of his limbs !—Ah, do you smile ?  
Why, even so I knew your smile would be,  
Just such an over-brimming of your soul.  
O love, love, love, then you have come to me !  
How I have stayed aching for you ! Come close,  
Here's where you should have been long time, long time.  
It is your rightful place. And I had left  
Thinking you'd come and kiss me over my heart !  
Ah lad, my lad, they told me you were dead.

## IV

*At Dawn. The Scottish Gate.*

*Mary (on her way to the gate, singing to herself).*

As a wind that has run all day  
Among the fragrant clover,  
At evening to a valley comes ;  
So comes to me my lover.

And as all night a honey'd warmth  
Stays where the wind did lie,  
So when my lover leaves my arms  
My heart's all honey.

But what have I to do with this ? And when  
Was that song put in hiding 'mid my thought ?  
I might be on my way to meet and give  
Good morrow to my——Ah ! last night, last night !  
O fie ! I must not dream so.

*[At the Gate.*

*It was I !*

I am the girl whose lover they have killed,  
Who never saw him until out of death  
He lookt into my soul. I was to meet  
Somewhere in life my lover, and behold,  
He has turned into an inn I dare not enter,  
And gazes through a window at my soul  
Going on labour'd with this loving body.—  
Did I not sleep last night with you in my arms ?  
I could have sworn it. Why should body have

So large a part in love ? For if 'twere only  
Spirit knew how to love, an easy road  
My feet had down to death. But I must want  
Lips against mine, and arms marrying me,  
And breast to kiss with its dear warmth my breast,—  
Body must love ! O me, how it must ache  
Before it is as numb as thine, dear boy !  
Poor darling, didst thou forget that I was made  
To wed thee, body and soul ? For surely else  
Thou hadst not gone from life.—

Ah, folk already,

Coming to curse the light with all their stares.

## V

KATRINA *and* JEAN.

*Katrina.*

Where are you off to, Jean, in such a tear ?

*Jean.*

I'm busy.

*Katrina.*

O you light-skirts ! who is it now ?  
You think I can't guess what your business is ?  
Is it aught fresh, or only old stuff warmed ?

*Jean.*

Does not the smartness in your wits, Katrina,  
Make your food smack sourly ?—Well, this time,  
It's serious with me. I believe I'm caught.

*Katrina.*

O but you've had such practice in being caught,  
You'll break away quite easily when you want.  
Tell me now who it is.

*Jean.*

The man who spoke  
When we were at the Seottish Gate that day.  
O, he's a dapper boy ! Did you mark his eyes ?

*Katrina.*

Nay, I saw nought but he was under-grown.

*Jean.*

Pooh ! He can carry me.

*Katrina.*

Jean, have you heard  
Of Mary lately ?—I vow she's in love.

*Jean.*

Never ! with whom ?

*Katrina.*

The thing's a wonder, Jean.  
She'll speak to no one now, and every day,  
Morning and evening, she's at the gate  
Gazing like a fey creature on that head  
She was so stricken to behold—you mind it ?—  
I tell you she's in love with it.

*Jean.*

O don't be silly.  
How can you fall in love with a dead man ?  
And what good could he do you, if you did ?  
One loves for kisses and for hugs and the rest ;  
A spunky fellow,—that's the thing to love.  
But a dead man,—pah, what a foolery !

*Katrina.*

O yes, to you ; for Love's a game for you.  
'Twill turn out dangerous maybe, but still,—a game.

*Jean.*

Yes, the best kind of game a girl can play,  
And all the better for the risk, Katrina.  
But where the fun would be in Love if he  
You played with had not heart to jump, nor blood  
To tingle, nothing in him to go wild  
At seeing you betray your love for him,  
Beats me to understand. You'd be as wise  
Blowing the bellows at a pile of stone  
As loving one that never lived for you.  
It isn't just to make a wind you blow,  
But to turn red fire into white quivering heat.  
Whatever she's after, 'tis not love, my girl :  
I know what love is. But perhaps she saw  
The poor lad living ? Even had speech with him ?

*Katrina.*

Not she ; Mary has never known a lad  
I did not know as well. We've shared our lives  
As if we had been sisters, and I'm sure  
She's never been in love before.

*Jean.*

Before ?

Don't talk such sentimental nonsense—

*Katrina.*

Why,

If Love-at-first-sight can mean anything,  
Surely 'tis this : there's some one in the world

Whom, if you come across him, you must love,  
And you could no more pass his face unmoved  
Than the year could go backwards. Well, suppose  
He dies just ere you meet him ; and he dead,  
Ay, or his head alone, is given your eyes,  
It is enough : he is the man for you,  
All as if he were quick and signalling  
His heart to you in smiles.

*Jean.*

Believe me, dear,  
You've no more notion of the thing called Love  
Than a grig has of talking. But I have,  
And I'm off now to practise with my notions.

*Katrina.*

Now which is the real love,—hers or Mary's ?

## VI

*Before Dawn. At the Scottish Gate.*

*Mary.*

Beloved, beloved !—O forgive me  
That all these days questioning I have been,  
Struggled with doubts. Your power over me,  
That here slipt through the nets death caught you in,  
Lighted on me so greatly that my heart  
Could scarcely carry the amazement. Now  
I am awake and seeing ; and I come  
To save you from this post of ignominy.

A ladder I have filched and thro' the streets  
Borne it, on shoulders little used to weight.  
You'll say that I should not have bruised myself?—  
But it is good, and an ease for me, to have  
Some ache of body.—Now if there's any chink  
In death, surely my love will reach to thee,  
Surely thou wilt be ware of how I go  
Henceforth through life utterly thine. And yet  
Pardon what now I say, for I must say it.  
I cannot thank thee, my dear murder'd lad,  
For mastering me so. What other girls  
Might say in blessing on their sweethearts' heads,  
How can I say? They are well done to, when  
Love of a man their beings like a loom  
Seizes, and the loose ends of purposes  
Into one beautiful desire weaves.  
But love has not so done to me: I was  
A nature clean as water from the hills,  
One that had pleased the lips of God; and now  
Brackish I am, as if some vagrom malice  
Had trampled up the springs and made them run  
Channelling ancient seecies of salt.

O me, what, has my tongue these bitter words  
In front of my love's death? Look down, sweetheart,  
From the height of thy sacred ignominy  
And see my shame. Nay, I will come up to thee  
And have my pardon from thy lips, and do  
The only good I can to thee, sweetheart.

. . . . .

I have done it: but how have I done it?  
And what's this horrible thing to do with me?

How came it on the ground, here at my feet ?  
O I had better have shirkt it altogether !  
What do I love ? Not this ; this is only  
A message that he left on earth for me,  
Signed by his spirit, that he had to go  
Upon affairs more worthy than my love.  
We women must give place in our men's thoughts  
To matters such as those.  
God, God, why must I love him ? Why  
Must life be all one scope for the hawking wings  
Of Love, that none the mischief can escape ?—  
Well, I am thine for always now, my love,  
For this has been our wedding. No one else,  
Since thee I have had claspt unto my breast,  
May touch me lovingly.—

Light, it is light !

What shall I do with it, now I have got it ?  
O merciful God, must I handle it  
Again ? I dare not ; what is it to me ?  
Let me off this ! Who is it clutches me  
By the neck behind ? Who has hold of me  
Forcing me stoop down ? Love, is it thou ?  
Spare me this service, thou who hast all else  
Of my maimed life : why wilt thou be cruel ?  
O grip me not so fiercely, Love ! Ah no,  
I will not : 'tis abominable——

JEAN

I

*The Parlour of a Public House. Two young men, MORRIS  
and HAMISH.*

*Hamish.*

Come, why so moody, Morris? Either talk,  
Or drink, at least.

*Morris.*

I'm wondering about Love.

*Hamish.*

Ho, are you there, my boy? Who may it be?

*Morris.*

I'm not in love; but altogether posed  
I am by lovers.

*Hamish.*

They're a simple folk:

I'm one.

*Morris.*

It's you I'm mainly thinking of.

*Hamish.*

Why, that's an honour, surely.

*Morris.*

Now if I loved  
The girl you love, your Jean, (look where she goes  
Waiting on drinkers, hearing their loose tongues ;  
And yet her clean thought takes no more of soil  
Than white-hot steel laid among dust can take !)—

*Hamish.*

You not in love, and talking this fine stuff ?

*Morris.*

I say, if I loved Jean, I'd do without  
All these vile pleasures of the flesh, your mind  
Seems running on for ever : I would think  
A thought that was always tasting them would make  
The fire a foul thing in me, as the flame  
Of burning wood, which has a rare sweet smell,  
Is turned to bitter stink when it scorches flesh.

*Hamish.*

Why specially Jean ?

*Morris.*

Why Jean ? The girl's all spirit !

*Hamish.*

She's a lithe burd, it's true ; that, I suppose,  
Is why you think her made of spirit,—unless  
You've seen her angry : she has a blazing temper.—  
But what's a girl's beauty meant for, but to rouse  
Lust in a man ? And where's the harm in that,—  
In loving her because she's beautiful,  
And in the way that drives me ?—I dare say  
My spirit loves her too. But if it does  
I don't know what it loves.

*Morris.*

Why, man, her beauty  
Is but the visible manners of her spirit ;  
And this you go to love by the filthy road  
Which all the paws and hoofs in the world tread too !  
God ! And it's Jean whose lover runs with the herd  
Of grunting, howling, barking lovers,—Jean !—

*Hamish.*

O spirit, spirit, spirit ! What is spirit ?  
I know I've got a body, and it loves :  
But who can tell me what my spirit's doing,  
Or even if I have one ?

*Morris.*

Well, it's strange,  
My God, it's strange. A girl goes through the world  
Like a white sail over the sea, a being  
Woven so fine and lissom that her life  
Is but the urging spirit on its journey,  
And held by her in shape and attitude.  
And all she's here for is that you may clutch  
Her spirit in the love of a mating beast !

*Hamish.*

Why, she has fifty lovers if she has one,  
And fifty's few for her.

*Morris.*

I'm going out.  
If the night does me good, I'll come back here  
Maybe, and walk home with you.

*Hamish.*

O don't bother.

If I want spirit, it will be for drinking.

[MORRIS goes out.]

Spirit or no, drinking's better than talking.

Who was the sickly fellow to invent

That crazy notion spirit, now, I wonder ?

But who'd have thought a burly lout like Morris

Would join the brabble ? Sure he'll have in him

A pint more blood than I have ; and he's all

For loving girls with words, three yards away !

*JEAN comes in.*

*Jean.*

Alone, my boy ? Who was your handsome friend ?

*Hamish.*

Whoever he was he's gone. But I'm still here.

*Jean.*

O yes, you're here ; you're always here.

*Hamish.*

Of course,

And you know why.

*Jean.*

Do I ? I've forgotten.

*Hamish.*

Jean, how can you say that ? O how can you ?

*Jean.*

Now don't begin to pity yourself, please.

*Hamish.*

Ah, I am learning now ; it's truth they talk.  
You would undo the skill of a spider's web  
And take the inches of it in one line,  
More easily than know a woman's thought.  
I'm ugly on a sudden ?

*Jean.*

The queer thing  
About you men is that you will have women  
Love in the way you do. But now learn this ;  
We don't love fellows for their skins ; we want  
Something to wonder at in the way they love.  
A chap may be as rough as brick ; if you like,  
Yes, or a mannikin and grow a tail,—  
If he's the spunk in him to love a girl  
Mainly and heartily, he's the man for her.—  
My soul, I've done with all you pretty men ;  
I want to stand in a thing as big as a wind ;  
And I can only get your paper fans !

*Hamish.*

You've done with me ? You wicked Jean ! You'll dare  
To throw me off like this ? After you've made,  
O, made my whole heart love you ?

*Jean.*

You are no good.

Your friend, now, seems a likely man ; but you ?—  
I thought you were a torch ; and you're a squib.

*Hamish.*

Not love you enough ? Death, I'll show you then.

*Jean.*

Hands off, Hamish. There's smoke in you, I know,  
And splutter too. Hands off, I say.

*Hamish.*

By God

Tell me to-morrow there's no force in me !

*Jean.*

Leave go, you little beast, you're hurting me :  
I never thought you'd be so strong as this.  
Let go, or I'll bite ; I mean it. You young fool,  
I'm not for you. Take off your hands. O help !

[MORRIS *has come in unseen and rushes forward.*

*Morris.*

You beast ! You filthy villainous fellow !—Now,  
I hope I've hurt the hellish brain in you.  
Take yourself off. You'll need a nurse to-night.

[HAMISH *slinks out.*

Poor girl ! And are you sprained at all ? That ruffian !

*Jean.*

O sir, how can I thank you ? You don't know  
What we poor serving girls must put up with.  
We don't hear many voices like yours, sir.  
They think, because we serve, we've no more right  
To feelings than their cattle. O forgive me  
Talking to you. You don't come often here.

*Morris.*

No, but I will : after to-night I'll see  
You take no harm. And as for him, I'll smash him.

*Jean.*

Yes, break the devil's ribs,—I mean,—O leave me ;  
I'm all distraught.

*Morris.*

Good night, Jean. My name's Morris.

*Jean.*

Good night, Morris—dear. O I must thank you.  
[*She suddenly kisses him.*]  
Perhaps,—perhaps, you'll think that wicked of me ?

*Morris.*

You wicked ? O how silly !—But—good night.  
[*He goes.*]

*Jean.*

The man, the man ! What luck ! My soul, what luck !

## II

JEAN *by herself, undressing.*

Yes, he's the man. Jean, my girl, you're done for,  
At last you're done for, the good God be thankd.—  
That was a wonderful look he had in his eyes :  
'Tis a heart, I believe, that will burn marvellously !  
Now what a thing it is to be a girl !

Who'd be a man ? Who'd be fuel for fire  
And not the quickening touch that sets it flaming ?—  
'Tis true that when we've set him well alight  
(As I, please God, have set this Morris burning)  
We must be serving him like something worshipt ;  
But is it to a man we kneel ? No, no ;  
But to our own work, to the blaze we kindled !  
O, he caught bravely. Now there's nothing at all  
So rare, such a wild adventure of glee,  
As watching love for you in a man beginning ;—  
To see the sight of you pour into his senses  
Like brandy gulpt down by a frozen man,  
A thing that runs scalding about his blood ;  
To see him holding himself firm against  
The sudden strength of wildness beating in him !  
O what my life is waiting for, at last  
Is started, I believe : I've turned a man  
To a power not to be reckoned ; I shall be  
Held by his love like a light thing in a river !

## III

MORRIS *by himself.*

It is a wonder ! Here's this poor thing, Life,  
Troubled with labours of the endless war  
The lusty flesh keeps up against the spirit ;  
And down amid the anger—who knows whence ?—  
Comes Love, and at once the struggling mutiny  
Falls quiet, unendurably rebuked :  
And the whole strength of life is free to serve

Spirit, under the regency of Love.  
The quiet that is in me ! The bright peace !  
Instead of smoke and dust, the peace of Love !  
Truly I knew not what a turmoil life  
Has been, and how rebellious, till this peace  
Came shining down ! And yet I have seen things,  
And heard things, that were strangely meaning this,—  
Telling me strangely that life can be all  
One power undisturbed, one perfect honour,—  
Waters at noonday sounding among hills,  
Or moonlight lost among vast curds of cloud ;—  
But never knew I it is only Love  
Can rule the noise of life to heavenly quiet.  
Ah, Jean, if thou wilt love me, thou shalt have  
Never from me upon thy purity  
The least touch of that eager baseness, known,  
For shame's disguising, by the name of Love  
Most wickedly ; thou shalt not need to fear  
Aught from my love, for surely thou shalt know  
It is a love that almost fears to love thee.

## IV

*The Public House.* MORRIS and JEAN.

*Jean.*

O, you are come again !

*Morris.*

Has he been here,  
That blackguard, with some insolence to you ?

*Jean.*

Who ?

*Morris.*

Why, that Hamish.

*Jean.*

Hamish ? No, not he.

*Morris.*

I thought—you seemed so breathless—

*Jean.*

But you've come

Again ! May I not be glad of your coming ?

Yes, and a little breathless ?—Did you come

Only because you thought I might be bullied ?

*Morris.*

O, no, no, no, Only for you I came.

*Jean.*

And that's what I was hoping.

*Morris.*

If you could know

How it has been with me, since I saw you !

*Jean.*

What can I know of your mind ?—For my own

Is hard enough to know,—save that I'm glad

You've come again,—and that I should have cried

If you'd not kept your word.

*Morris.*

My word ?—to see  
Hamish does nothing to you ?

*Jean.*

The fiend take Hamish !  
Do you think I'd be afraid of him ?—It's you  
I ought to be afraid of, were I wise.

*Morris.*

Good God, she's crying !

*Jean.*

Cannot you understand ?

*Morris.*

O darling, is it so ? I prayed for this  
All night, and yet it's unbelievable.

*Jean.*

You too, Morris ?

*Morris.*

There's nothing living in me  
But love for you, my sweetheart.

*Jean.*

And you are mine,  
My sweetheart !—And now, Morris, now you know  
Why you are the man that ought to frighten me !—  
Morris, I love you so !

*Morris.*

O, but better than this,  
Jean, you must love me. You must never think  
I'm like the heartless men you wait on here,  
Whose love is all a hunger that cares naught  
How hatefully endured its feasting must be  
By her who fills it, so it be well gluttoned !

*Jean.*

I did not say I was afraid of you ;  
But only that, perhaps, I ought to be.

*Morris.*

No, no, you never ought. My love is one  
That will not have its passion venturous ;  
It knows itself too fine a ceremony  
To risk its whole perfection even by one  
Unruly thought of the luxury in love.  
Nay, rather it is the quietness of power,  
That knows there is no turbulence in life  
Dare the least questioning hindrance set against  
The onward of its going,—therefore quiet,  
All gentle. But strong, Jean, wondrously strong !

*Jean.*

Yes, love is strong. I have well thought of that.  
It drops as fiercely down on us as if  
We were to be its prey. I've seen a gull  
That hovered with beak pointing and eyes fixt  
Where, underneath its swaying flight, some fish  
Was trifling, fooling in the waves : then, souse !  
And the gull has fed. And love on us has fed.

*Morris.*

Indeed 't is a sudden coming ; but I grieve  
To hear you make of love a cruelty.  
Sweetheart, it shall be nothing cruel to you !  
You shall not fear, in doing what love bids,  
Ever to know yourself unmaidenly.  
For see ! here's my first kiss ; and all my love  
Is signed in it ; and it is on your hand.—  
Is that a thing to fear ?—But it were best  
I go now. This should be a privacy,  
Not even your lover near, this hour of first  
Strange knowledge that you have accepted love.  
I think you would feel me prying, if I stayed  
While your heart falters into full perceiving  
That you are plighted now forever mine.  
God bless you, Jean, my sweetheart.—Not a word ?  
But you will thank me soon for leaving you :  
'Tis the best courtesy I can do.

[*He goes.*

*Jean.*

O, and I thought it was my love at last !  
I thought, from the look he had last night, I'd found  
That great, brave, irresistible love !—But this !  
It's like a man deformed, with half his limbs.  
Am I never to have the love I dream and need,  
Pouring over me, into me, winds of fire ?

*HAMISH comes in.*

*Hamish.*

Well ? What's the mood to-night ?—The girl's been  
crying !  
This should be something queer.

*Jean.*

It's you are to blame :

You brought him here !

*Hamish.*

It's Morris this time, is it ?

And what has he done ?

*Jean.*

He's insulted me.

And you must never let me see him again.

*Hamish.*

Sure I don't want him seeing you. But still,  
If I'm to keep you safe from meeting him—

*Jean.*

To look in his eyes would mortify my heart !

*Hamish.*

Then you'd do right to pay me.

*Jean.*

What you please.

*Hamish.*

A kiss ?

*Jean.*

Of course ; as many as you like—  
And of any sort you like.

## KATRINA

### I

*On the sea-coast. Three young men, SYLVAN, VALENTINE,  
and FRANCIS.*

*Valentine.*

Well, I suppose you're out of your fear at last,  
Sylvan. This land's empty enough ; naught here  
Feminine but the hens, bitches, and cows.  
Now we are safe !

*Francis.*

Horribly safe ; for here,  
If there are wives at all, they are salted so  
They have no meaning for the blood, bent things  
Philosophy allows not to be women.

*Valentine.*

But think of the husbands that must spend their nights  
Alongside skin like bark. It is the men  
That have the tragedy in these weather'd lands.

*Francis.*

No thought of that ! We are monks now. And, indeed,  
This is a cloister that a man could like,  
This blue-aired space of grassy land, that here,

Just as it touches the sea's bitter mood,  
Is troubled into dunes, as it were thrilled,  
Like a calm woman trembling against love.

*Sylvan.*

Woman again !—How, knowing you, I failed  
So long to know the truth, I cannot think.

*Francis.*

And what's the truth ?

*Sylvan.*

Woman and love of her  
Is as a dragging ivy on the growth  
Of that strong tree, man's nature !

*Valentine.*

Yes. But now  
Tell us a simpler sort of truth. Was she——

*Sylvan.*

She ? Who ?

*Valentine.*

Katrina, of course : who else, when one  
Speaks of a she to you ?

*Sylvan.*

And what about her ?

*Valentine.*

Was she too cruel to you, or too kind ?

*Sylvan.*

Ah, there's no hope for men like you ; you're sunk  
Above your consciences in smothering ponds  
Of sweet imagination,—drowned in woman !

*Francis.*

Ay ? Clarence and the Malmesey over again ;  
'Twas a delightful death.

*Valentine.*

But you forget,  
Sylvan, we've come as your disciples here.

*Sylvan.*

Yes, to a land where not the least desire  
Need prey upon your mettle. There are hours  
A god might gladly take in these basking dunes,—  
Nothing but summer and piping larks, and air  
All a warm breath of honey, and a grass  
All flowers—sweet thyme and golden heart's-case here !  
And under scent and song of flowers and birds,  
Far inland out of the golden bays the air  
Is charged with briny savour, and whispered news  
Gentle as whitening oats the breezes stroke.  
What good is all this health to you ? You bring  
Your own thoughts with you ; and they are vinegar,  
Endlessly rusting what should be clear steel.

*Francis.*

I do begin to doubt our enterprise,  
The grand Escape from Woman. It lookt brave  
And nobly hazardous afar off, to cease  
All wenching, whether in deed or word or thought.  
And yet I fear pride egged us. We had done  
Better to be more humble, and bring here  
A girl apiece.

*Valentine.*

Yes, Sylvan ; you must think  
The cloister were a thing more comfortable  
With your Katrina in it ?

*Sylvan.*

My Katrina !  
And do you think, supposing I would love,  
I'd bank in such a crazy safe as that  
Katrina ? One of those soft shy-spoken maids,  
Who are only maids through fear ? Whose life is all  
A simpering pretence of modesty ?  
If it was love I wanted, 'twould not be  
A dish of sweet stewed pears, laced with brandy.  
But I can do without a woman's kisses.

*Valentine.*

Can you ?—You know full well, in the truth of your  
heart,  
That there's no man in all the world of men  
Whose will woman's beauty cannot divide  
Easily as a sword cuts jetting water.

*Sylvan.*

Have you not heard, that even jetting water  
May have such spouting force, that it becomes  
A rod of glittering white iron, and swords  
Will beat rebounding on its speed in vain ?—  
Of such a force I mean to have my will.

[*He sits and stares moodily out to sea. His companions whisper each other.*]

*Valentine.*

Here, Francis ! Look you yonder. O but this,  
This is the joke of the world !

*Francis.*

Hallo ! a girl !  
And, by the Lord, Katrina !—But why here ?

*Valentine.*

She's followed him, of course ; she's heard of this  
Mad escapade and followed after him.

*Francis.*

She has not seen us yet. Now what to do ?

*Valentine.*

Quick ! Where's your handkerchief ? Truss his  
wrists and ankles,  
And pull his coat up over his head and leave him !  
He won't get free of her again ; she'll lead  
His wildness home and keep him tame for ever.  
Now !

*[They fall on him, bind him, and blindfold him.]*

*Sylvan.*

What are you doing ? Whatever are you doing ?  
Hell burn you, let me go !

*Valentine.*

There's worse to come.  
*[They make off, and leave SYLVAN shouting.]*  
KATRINA runs in.

*Katrina.*

Dear Heaven ! Were they robbers ? Have they hurt  
you ?

*[She releases him. He stands up.]*

*Sylvan.*

Katrina !

*Katrina.*

Sylvan !

*Sylvan.*

How did you plot this ?  
I thought I'd put leagues between you and me.

*Katrina.*

Why have you come here ?

*Sylvan.*

To find you, it seems.  
But what you're doing here, that I'd like to know.

*Katrina.*

I came to see my grandmother : she lives  
All by herself, poor grannam, and it's time  
She had some help about the house, and care.

*Sylvan.*

Let's have a better tale. You followed me.

*Katrina.*

Sylvan, how dare you make me out so vile ?

*Sylvan.*

How dare you mean to make this body of mine  
A thing with no thought in it but your beauty ?

*Katrina.*

You shall not speak so wickedly. You've had  
The half of my truth only : here's the whole.  
It was from you I fled ! I hoped to make  
My grannam's lonely cottage something safe  
From you and what I hated in you.

*Sylvan.*

Love ?—

Ah, so it's all useless.

*Katrina.*

I feared to know  
You wanted me,—horribly I feared it.  
And now you've found me out.

*Sylvan.*

Is this the truth ?—

No help for it, then.

*Katrina.*

O, I'm a liar to you !

*Sylvan.*

Strange how we grudge to be ruled ! rather than be  
Divinely driven to happiness, we push back  
And fiercely try for wilful misery.—

Dearest, forgive me being cruel to you,  
You who are in life like a heavenly dream  
In the evil sleep of a sinner.

*Katrina.*

No, you hate me.

*Sylvan (kissing her).*

Is this like hatred ?

*Katrina (in his arms).*

Sylvan, I have been  
So wreathed and fearfully used. It was as if  
This being that I live in had become  
A savage endless water, wild with purpose  
To tire me out and drown me.

*Sylvan.*

Yes, I know :  
Like swimming against a mighty will, that wears  
The cruelty, the race and scolding spray  
Of monstrous passionate water.

*Katrina.*

Hold me, Sylvan :  
I'm bruised with my sore wrestling.

*Sylvan.*

Ah, but now  
We are not swimmers in this dangerous life.  
It cannot beat upon our limbs with surf  
Of water clenched against us, nor can waves

Now wrangle with our breath. Out of it we  
Are lifted ; and henceforward now we are  
Sailors travelling in a lovely ship,  
The shining sails of it holding a wind  
Immortally pleasant, and the malicious sea  
Smoothed by a keel that cannot come to wreck.

*Katrina.*

Alas, we must not stay together here.  
Grannam will come upon us.

*Sylvan.*

Where is she ?

*Katrina.*

Yonder, gathering driftwood for her fire.  
There is a little bay not far from here,  
The shingle of it a thronging city of flies,  
Feeding on the dead weed that mounds the beach ;  
And the sea hoards there its vain avarice,—  
Old flotsam, and decaying trash of ships.  
An arm of reef half locks it in, and holds  
The bottom of the bay deep strewn with seaweed,  
A barn full of the harvesting of storms ;  
And at full tide, the little hampered waves  
Lift up the litter, so that, against the light,  
The yellow kelp and bracken of the sea,  
Held up in ridges of green water, show  
Like moss in agates. And there is no place  
In all the coast for wreckage like this bay ;  
There often will my grannam be, a sack  
Over her shoulders, turning up the crust  
Of sun-dried weed to find her winter's warmth.

*Sylvan.*

Is that she coming ?

*Katrina.*

O Sylvan, has she seen us ?

*Sylvan.*

What matter if she has ?

*Katrina.*

But it would matter !

*Sylvan.*

Katrina, come with me now ! We'll go together  
Back to my house.

*Katrina.*

No, no, not now ! I must  
Carry my grannam's load for her : 'tis heavy.

*Sylvan.*

We must not part again.

*Katrina.*

No, not for long ;  
For if we do, there will be storms again,  
I know ; and a fierce reluctance—O, a mad  
Tormenting thing !—will shake me.

*Sylvan.*

Then come now !

*Katrina.*

Not now, not now ! Look how my poor grannam  
Shuffles under the weight ; she's old for burdens.  
I must carry her sack for her.

*Sylvan.*

Well, to-night !

*Katrina.*

To-night ?—O Sylvan ! dare I ?

*Sylvan.*

Yes, you dare !

You will be knowing I'm outside in the darkness,  
And you will come down here and give me yourself  
Wholly and forever.

*Katrina.*

O not to-night !

*Sylvan.*

I shall be here, Katrina, waiting for you.

[*He goes.*

*The old woman comes in burdened with her sack.*

*Grandmother.*

Katrina, that was a young man with you.

*Katrina.*

O grannam, you've had luck to-day ; but now  
It's I must be the porter.

*Grandmother (giving up the sack).*

Ay, you take it.

It's sore upon my back. You should have care  
Of these young fellows ; there's a devil in them.  
Never you talk with a man on the seashore  
Or on hill-tops or in woods and suchlike places,  
Especially if he's one you think of marrying.

*Katrina.*

Marrying ? I shall never be married !

*Grandmother.*

Pooh !

That's nonsense.

*Katrina.*

I should think 'twas horrible  
Even to be in love and wanting to give  
Yourself to another ; but to be married too,  
A man holding the very heart of you,—

*Grandmother.*

He never does, honey, he never does.—  
We're late ; come along home.

## II

*In SYLVAN'S house. SYLVAN and KATRINA talking to  
each other and betweenwhiles thinking to themselves.*

*Sylvan.*

How pleasant and beautiful it is to be  
At last obedient to love ! (*To know  
Also, I've sold myself,—is that so pleasant ?*)

*Katrina.*

I cannot think, why such a glorious wealth  
As this of love on our hearts should be spent.  
What have we done, that all this gain be ours ?  
(*Nor can I think why my life should be mixt,  
Even its dearest secrecy, with another.*)

*Sylvan.*

Ay, there's the marvel ! If to enter life  
Needed some courage, 'twere a kind of wages,  
As they let sacking soldiers take home loot :  
But we are shuffled into life like puppets  
Emptied out of a showman's bag ; and then  
Made spenders of the joys current in heaven !  
(*Not such a marvel neither, if this love  
Be but the price I'm paid for my free soul.  
Who's the old trader that has lent this girl  
The glittering cash of pleasure to pay me with ?  
Who is it,—the world, or the devil, or God—that wants  
To buy me from myself?*)

*Katrina.*

And then how vain  
To think we can hold back from being enricht !  
It is not only offered——

*Sylvan.*

No, 'tis a need  
As irresistible within our hearts  
As body's need of breathing. (*That I should be  
So avaricious of his gleaming price !*)

*Katrina.*

And the instant force it has upon us, when  
We think to use love as a privilege !  
We are like bees that, having fed all day  
On mountain-heather, go to a tumbling stream  
To please their little honey-heated thirsts ;  
And soon as they have toucht the singing relief,  
The swiftness of the water seizes them.

*Sylvan.*

And onward, sprawling and spinning, they are carried  
Down to a drowning pool.

*Katrina.*

O Sylvan, drowning ?  
(*Deeper than drowning ! Why should it not be  
Our hearts need wish only what they delight in ?*)

*Sylvan.*

Well, altogether gript by the being of love.  
(*Yes, now the bargain's done ; and I may wear,  
Like a cheated savage, scarlet dyes and strings  
Of beaded glass, all the pleasure of love !*)

*Katrina.*

It is a wonderful tyranny, that life  
Has no choice but to be delighted love !  
(*I know what I must do : I am to abase  
My heart utterly, and have nothing in me  
That dare take pleasure beyond serving love.  
Thus only shall I bear it ; and perhaps—  
Might I even of my abasement make  
A passion, fearfully enjoying it ?*)

*Sylvan.*

You are full of thoughts, sweetheart ?

*Katrina.*

And so are you :

A long while since you kist me ! (*What have I said ?*

*O fool so to remind him ! I shall scarce*

*Help crying out or shuddering this time !—*

*Ah no ; I am again a fool ! Not thus*

*I am to do, but in my heart to break*

*All the reluctance ; it must have on me*

*No pleasure ; else I am endlessly tortured.)*

Then I must kiss you, Sylvan !

[*She kisses him.*

*Sylvan.*

Ah, my darling !

(*God ! it went through my flesh as thrilling sound*

*Must shake a fiddle when the strings are snatcht !*

*Will she make the life in me all a slave*

*Of my kist body,—a trembling, eager slave ?*

*It ran like a terror to my heart, the sense,*

*The shivering delight upon my skin,*

*Of her lips touching me.) My beloved,—*

It may be it were wise, that we took care

Our pleasant love come never in the risk

Of being too much known.

*Katrina.*

O what a risk

To think of here ! Love is not common life,

But always fresh and sweet. Can this grow stale ?

[*She kisses him again.*

*Sylvan.*

O never ! I meant not so.—Yes, always sweet !  
*(She must not kiss me ! Ah, it leaves my heart*  
*Aghast, and stopt with pain of the joy of her ;*  
*And her loved body is like an agony*  
*Clinging upon me. O she must not kiss me !*  
*I will not be a thing excruciated*  
*To please her passion, an anguish of delight !)*

## **PART III**

### **VIRGINITY AND PERFECTION**



## JUDITH

### I

#### THE BESIEGED CITY OF BETHULIA

JUDITH (*at the window of an upper room of her house*).

This pitiable city !—But, O God,  
Strengthen me that I bend not into scorn  
Of all this desperate folk ; for I am weak  
With pitying their lamentable souls.  
Ah, when I hear the grief wail'd in the streets,  
And the same breath their tears nigh strangle, used  
To brag the God in them inviolate  
And fighting off the hands of the heathen,—Lord,  
Pardon me that I come so near to scorn ;  
Pardon me, soul of mine, that I have loosed  
The rigour of my mind and leant towards scorn !—

Friends, wives and husbands, sons and daughters, dead  
Of plague, famine, and arrows : and the houses  
Battered unsafe by cannonades of stone  
Hurled in by the Assyrians : the town-walls  
Crumbling out of their masonry into mounds  
Of foolish earth, so smitten by the rams :  
The hunger-pangs, the thirst like swallowed lime  
Forcing them gulp green water maggot-quick

That lurks in corners of dried cisterns : yea,  
Murders done for a drink of blood, and flesh  
Sodden of infants : and no hope alive  
Of rescue from this heat of prisoning anguish  
Until Assyrian swords drown it in death ;—  
These, and abandoned words like these, I hear  
Daylong shrill'd and groan'd in the lanes beneath.  
What needeth Holofernes more ? The Jews,  
The People of God, the Jews, lament their fortune ;  
Their souls are violated by the world ;  
Jewry is conquered ; and the crop of men  
Sown for the barns of God, is withered down,  
Like feeblest grass flat-trodden by the sun,  
In one short season of fear. Yea, swords and fire  
Can do no more destruction on this folk :  
A fierce untimely mowing now befits  
This corn incapable of sacred bread,  
This field unprofitable but to flame !

What should the choice of God do for a people,  
But give them souls of temper to withstand  
The trying of the furnace of the world ?—  
And they are molten, and from God's device  
Unfashion'd, crazed in dismay ; yea, God's skill  
Fails in them, as the skill a founder put  
In brass fails when the coals seize on his work.  
For this fierce Holofernes and his power,  
This torture poured on the city, is no more  
Than a wild gust of wicked heat breathed out  
Against our God-wrought souls by the world's furnace.  
No new thing, this camp about the city :  
Nebuchadnezzar and his hosted men  
But fearfully image, like a madman's dream,

The fierce infection of the world, that waits  
 To soil the clean health of the soul and mix  
 Stooping decay into its upward nature.  
 Soul in the world is all besieged : for first  
 The dangerous body doth desire it ;  
 And many subtle captains of the mind  
 Secretly wish against its fortune ; next,  
 Circle on circle of lascivious world  
 Lust round the foreign purity of soul  
 For chance or violence to ravish it.

But the pure in the world are mastery.  
 Divinely do I know, when life is clean,  
 How like a noble shape of golden glass  
 The passions of the body, powers of the mind,  
 Chalice the sweet immortal wine of soul,  
 That, as a purple fragrance dwells in air  
 From vintage poured, fills the corrupting world  
 With its own savour. And here I am alone  
 Sound in my sweetness, incorrupt ; the rest  
 (They noise it unashamed) are stuff gone sour ;  
 The world has meddled with them. They have broacht  
 The wine that had pleas'd God to flocking thirst  
 Of flies and wasps, to fears and worldly sorrows.  
 Nay, they are poured out into the dung of the world,  
 And drench, pollute, the fortune of their state,  
 When they should have no fortune but themselves  
 And the God in them, and be sealed therein.

Ah, my sweet soul, that knoweth its own sweetness,  
 Where only love may drink, and only—alas !—  
 The ghost of love. But I am sweet for him,  
 For him and God, and for my sacred self !

But hark, a troop of new woe comes this way,

Making the street to ring and the stones wet  
With cried despair and brackish agony.

*CITIZENS lamenting in the street below.*

They have crawled back like beasts dying of thirst,  
The life all clotted in them. They went out  
Soldiers, and back like beaten dogs they came  
Breathing in whines, slow maimed four-footed things  
On hands and knees degraded, groaning steps.  
Their brains were full of battle, they were made  
Of virtue, brave men ; now in their brains shudder  
Minds that cringe like children burnt with fever.  
Often they stood to face the enemies' ranks  
All upright as a flame in windless air,  
Wearing their arm and the bright skill of swords  
Like spirits clad in flashing fire of heaven ;  
And now in darken'd rooms they lie afraid  
And whimper if the nurse moves suddenly.—  
Ah God, that such an irresistible fiend,  
Pain, in the beautiful housing of man's flesh  
Should sleep, light as a leopard in its hunger,  
Beside the heavenly soul ; and at a wound  
Leap up to mangle her, the senses' guest !—  
That in God's country heathen men should do  
This worse than murder on men full of God !

*Judith.*

What matter of new wailing do your tongues  
Wear in this shivering misery of sound ?

*A Citizen.*

The captains which were chosen to go out  
And treat with Holofernes have come back.

*Judith.*

And did the Ninevite demon treat with them ?

*A Citizen.*

The words they had from him were flaying knives,  
And burning splinters fixt in their skinless flesh,  
And stones thrown till their breasts were broken in.

*Judith.*

What, torture our embassy ?

*A Citizen.*

Yea, for he means  
Nothing but death to all the Jews he takes.

*Another.*

There was a jeering word tied round the neck  
Of each tormented man : “ Behold, ye Jews,  
These chiefs of yours have learnt to crawl in prayer  
Before the god Nebuchadnezzar ; come,  
Leave your city of thirst and your weak god,  
And learn good worship even as these have learnt.”

*Another.*

I saw them coming in : O horrible !  
With broken limbs creeping along the ground—

*Judith.*

Were I a man among you, I would not stay  
Behind the walls to weep this insolence ;  
I'd take a sword in my hand and God in my mind,

And seek under the friendship of the night  
That tent where Holofernes' crimes and hate  
Sleep in his devilish brain.

*A Citizen.*

There is no night  
Where Holofernes sleeps, as thou couldst tell,  
Didst thou not shut thyself up in thine ease  
Away from the noise and tears of common woe.  
Come to the walls this evening, and I'll show thee  
The golden place of light, the little world  
Of triumphing glory framed in midst of the dark,  
Pillar'd on four great bonfires fed with spice,  
Enclosing in a globe of flame the tent  
Wherein the sleepless lusts of Holofernes  
Madden themselves all night, a revel-rout  
Of naked girls luring him as he lies  
Filling his blood with wine, the scented air  
Injur'd marvellously with piping shrills  
Of lechery made music, and small drums  
That with a dancing throb drive his swell'd heart  
Into desires beyond the strength of man.

*Judith.*

And this beast is thine enemy, God !

*Another Citizen.*

Nor beast,  
Nor man, but one of those lascivious gods  
Our lonely God detests, Chemosh or Baal  
Or Peor who goes whoring among women.

*Another.*

And now come down braving in God's own land,  
Pitching the glory of his fearful heaven  
All night among God's hills.

*Judith.*

You fools, he is  
A life our God could snap as a woman snaps  
Thread of her sewing.

*A Citizen.*

Who shall break him off,  
Who on the earth, from his huge twisted power ?

*Another.*

For in his brain, as in a burning-glass  
Wide glow of sun drawn to a pin of fire,  
Are gathered into incredible fierceness all  
The rays of the dark heat of heathen strength.

*Another.*

His eyes, they say, can kill a man.

*Another.*

And sure  
No murder could approach his flaming nights.

*Another.*

Unless it came as a woman at whose beauty  
His lust hath never sipt ; for into his flesh  
To drink unknown desirable limbs as wine  
Torments him still, like a thirst when fever pours  
A man's life out in drenching sweats.

*Judith.*

Peace, peace ;

The siege hath given you shameless tongues, and minds  
No more your own : yea, the foul Ninevite  
Hath mastered you already, for your thoughts  
Dwell in his wickedness and marvel at it.  
Hate not a thing too much, lest you be drawn  
Wry from yourselves and close to the thing ye hate.

*A Citizen.*

We know thy wisdom, Judith ; but our lives  
Belong to death ; and wisdom to a man  
Dying, is water in a broken jar.

*Judith.*

Yea, if thou wilt die of a parching mouth.

*A Citizen.*

Thou art rich, and thou hast much cool store of wine.  
But the town thirsts, and every beat of our blood  
Hastens us on to maniac agony.  
The Assyrians have our wells, and half the tanks  
Are dry, and the pools shoal with baking mud :  
The water left to us is pestilent.  
And therefore have we asked the governors  
For death : and it is granted us.

*Another.*

Five days

Hath Prince Ozias bidden us endure.

*Another.*

For there are still fools among us who dare trust  
God has not made a bargain of our lives.

*Another.*

We are a small people, and our war is weak :  
Who knows whether our God doth not desire  
Armies and great plains full of spears and horses,  
And cities made of bronze and hewn white stone  
And scarlet awnings, throng'd with sworded men,  
To shout his name up from the earth and kill  
All crying at the gates of other heavens ;  
And hath grown tired of peaceable praise and folk  
That in a warren of dry mountains dwell,  
Whose few throats can make little noise in heaven.

*A Young Man.*

For sure God's love hath wandered to strange nations ;  
His pleasure in the breasts of Jerusalem  
Is a delight grown old. Yea, he would change  
That shepherd-woman of the earthly cities,  
Whose mind is as the clear light of her hills,  
Full of the sound of a hundred waters falling ;  
And poureth his desire out, belike,  
Upon that queen the wealth of the world hath clad,  
Babylon, for whose golden bed the gods  
Wrangle like young men with great gifts and boasts ;  
Whose mind is as a carbuncle of fire,  
Full of the sound of amazing flames of music.

*Another.*

Yea, what can Israel offer against her,  
Whom the rich earth out of her mines hath shod,

And crowned with emeralds grown in secret rocks,  
Who on her shoulders wears the gleam of the sea's  
Purple and pearls, and the flax of Indian ground  
Is linen on her limbs cool as moonlight,  
And fells of golden beasts cover her throne ;  
Whose passion moves in her thought as in the air  
Melody moves of flutes and silver horns :  
What can Jerusalem the hill-city  
Offer to keep God's love from Babylon ?

*Judith.*

What but the beauty of holiness, and sound  
Of music made by hearts adoring God ?  
You that speak lewdly of God, you yet shall see  
Jerusalem treading upon her foes.  
But what was that of five days one of you spoke ?

*A Citizen.*

Ozias swear an oath : hast thou not heard ?

*Judith.*

No, for I keep my mind away from your tongues  
Wisely. Who walks in wind-blown dust of streets,  
That hath a garden where the roses breathe ?

*A Citizen.*

I have no garden where the roses breathe ;  
I have a city full of women crying  
And babies starving and men weak with thirst  
Who fight each other for a dole of water.

*Another.*

Not only thou hast pleasant garden-hours,  
 Judith, here in Bethulia ; the Lord Death  
 Has bought the city for his garden-close,  
 And saunters in it watching the souls bloom  
 Out of their buds of flesh, and with delight  
 Smelling their agony.

*Another.*

But in five days  
 Either our God will turn his mind to us,  
 Or, if he careth not for us nor his honour,  
 Ozias will let open the main gate  
 And let the Assyrians end our dreadful lives.

*Judith.*

O I belong to a nation utterly lost !  
 God ! thou hast no tribe on the earth ; thy folk  
 Are helpless in the living places like  
 The ghosts that grieve in the winds under the earth.  
 Remember now thy glory among the living,  
 And let the beauty of thy renown endure  
 In a firm people knitted like the stone  
 Of hills, no mischief harms of frost or fire ;  
 But now dust in a gale of fear they are.  
 They have blasphemed thee ; but forgive them, God ;  
 And let my life inhabit to its end  
 The spirit of a people built to God.—  
 So you have given God five days to come  
 And help you ? You would make your souls as wares  
 Merchants hold up to bidders, and say, “ God,

Pay us our price of comfort, or we sell  
To death for the same coin " ? Five days God hath  
To find the cost of Jewry, or death buys you ?

*A Citizen.*

Here comes Ozias : ask him.

*Judith.*

Hold him there.

[JUDITH comes down into the street.

*Ozias.*

Judith, I came to speak with thee.

*Judith.*

And I

Would speak with thee. What tale is this they tell  
That thou hast sworn to give this people death ?

*Ozias.*

In five days those among us who still live  
Will have no souls but the fierce anguish of thirst.  
If God ere then relieves us, well. If not,  
We give ourselves away from God to death.

*Judith.*

Darest thou do this wickedness, and set  
Conditions to the mercy of our God ?

*Ozias.*

Death hath a mercy equal unto God's.—  
Look at the air above thee ; is there sign

Of mercy in that naked splendour of fire ?  
 Too Godlike ! We are his : he covers us  
 With golden flame of air and firmament  
 Of white-hot gold, marvellous to see.  
 But whom, what heathen land hated of God,  
 Do his grey clouds shadow with comfort of rain ?  
 Over our chosen heads his glory glows :  
 And in five days the torment in his city  
 Will be beyond imagining. We will go  
 Through swords into the quiet and cloud of death.

*Judith.*

Ozias, wilt thou be an infamy ?  
 Bethulia fallen, all Judea lies  
 Open to the feet and hoofs of Assyria.

*Ozias.*

Yea, and what doth Judea but cower down  
 Behind us ? There's no rescue comes from there.  
 We are alone with Holofernes' power.

*Judith.*

But if we hold him off, will he not grant  
 The meed of a brave fight, captivity ?—  
 Or we may treat with him, make terms for yielding.

*Ozias.*

We know his mind : he hath written it plain  
 In the torn flesh of our ambassadors.  
 His mind to us is death ; we can but choose  
 Between sharp swords and the slow slaying of thirst.

*Judith.*

He may torment us if we yield.

*Ozias.*

He may.

But not to yield is grisly and sure torment.

*Judith.*

There must be hope, if we could reckon right !

*Ozias.*

Well, thou and God have five days more to build  
A bridge of hope over our broken world.  
And, for the town even now fearfully aches  
In scalding thirst, not five days had I granted,  
Had it not been for somewhat I must say  
Secretly to thee.

*Judith.*

Secretly ? Then here ;  
Send off these men to labour at their groans  
Elsewhere ; for not within my house thou comest ;  
I'll have no thoughts against God in my house.

[OZIAS disperses the citizens.]

*Ozias.*

Judith, we are two upright minds in this  
Herd of grovelling cowardice. We should,  
To spiritual vision which can see  
Stature of spirit, seem to stand in our folk  
Like two unaltered stanchions in the heap  
Of a house pulled down by fire. I know thy soul

Tempered by trust in God against this ruin ;  
 But not in God, but in mortality  
 Thy soul stands founded ; and death even now  
 Is digging at thy station in the world ;  
 And as a man with ropes and windlasses  
 Pulls for new building columns of wreckt halls  
 Down with a breaking fall, so death has rigged  
 His skill about us, so he will break us down,  
 Ruin our height and courage ; and as stone,  
 Carved with the beautiful pride of kings, hath made,  
 Hammer'd to rubble and ground for mortar, walls  
 Of farms and byres, our kill'd and broken natures,  
 With all their beauty of passion, yea, and delight  
 In God, death will shape and grind up to new  
 Housing for souls not royal as we are,  
 New flesh and mind for mean souls and dull hearts :  
 For death is only life destroying life  
 To roof the coming swarms in mortal shelter  
 Of flesh and mind experienced in joy.

*Judith.*

Thy specious prologue means no good, I trow.  
 Thou wert to tell me wherefore for five days  
 We may pretend to be God's people still ;  
 Why thou didst not make us over to death  
 Soon as the folk began to wail despair.

*Ozias.*

This reasoning will tell thee why.—No need,  
 I think, to bring up into speech the years  
 Since in the barley-field Manasses lay  
 Shot by the sun. I tried (nor failed, I think),

To hold thy soul up from its hurt, and be  
Somewhat of sight to thee, until thy long  
Blind season of disaster should be changed.  
Always I have found friendship in thine eyes ;  
And pleasant words, and silences more pleasant,  
Have made us moments wherein all the world  
Left our sequester'd minds ; so that I dared  
Often believe our friendliness might be  
The brink of love.

*Judith.*

Stop ! for thou hast enough  
Disgraced mine ears.

*Ozias.*

I pray thee hear me out.  
The dream of loving thee and being loved  
Hath been my life ; yea, with it I have kept  
My heart drugg'd in a long delicious night  
Colour'd with candles of imagined sense,  
And musical with dreamt desire. I said,  
The day will surely come upon the world,  
To scatter this sweet night of fantasy  
With morning, pour'd on my dream-feasted heart  
Out of thine eyes, Judith. And yet I still  
Feared for my dream, even as a maiden fears  
The body of her lover. But, in the midst  
Of all this charm'd delaying,—behold Death  
Leapt into our world, lording it, standing huge  
In front of the future, looking at us !  
Thou seest now why, when the people came  
Crying wildly to be given up to death,

I bade them wait five days ?—That I at last  
 Might stamp the image of my glorious dream  
 Upon the world, even though it be wax  
 And the fires are kindling that must melt it out.  
 Judith, thou hast now five days more to live  
 This life of beautiful passion and sweet sense :  
 And now my love comes to thee like an angel  
 To call thee out of thy visionary love  
 For lost Manasses, out of ghostly desire  
 And shadows of dreams housing thy soul, that are  
 Vainer than mine were, dreams of dear things which death  
 Hath for ever broken ; and lead thy life  
 To a brief shadowless place, into an hour  
 Made splendid to affront the coming night  
 By passion over sense more grandly burning  
 Than purple lightning over golden eorn,  
 When all the distance of the night resounds  
 With the approach of wind and terrible rain,  
 That march to torment it down to the ground.  
 Judith, shall we not thus together make  
 Death admirable, yea, and triumph through  
 The gates of anguish with a prouder song  
 Than ever lifted a king's heart, who rode  
 Back from his war, with nations whipt before him,  
 Into trumpeting Nineveh ?

*Judith.*

Thou fool,  
 Death is nothing to me, and life is all.  
 But what foul wrong have I done to thee, Ozias,  
 That thou shouldst go about to put such wrong  
 Into my life as these defiling words ?

*Ozias.*

Is it defilement to hear love spoken ?

*Judith.*

Yes ! thou hast soiled me : to know my beauty,  
Wherewith I loved Manasses, and still love,  
Has all these years dwelt in thy heart a dream  
Of favourite lust,—O this is foul in my mind.

*Ozias.*

I meant not what thou callest lust, but love.

*Judith.*

What matters that ? Thou hast desired me.  
And knowing that, I feel my beauty clutch  
About my soul with a more wicked shame  
Than if I lived corrupt with leprosy.

*Ozias.*

Wilt thou still let the dead have claim on thee ?  
Judith, wilt thou be married to a grave ?

*Judith.*

I am married to my love ; and it is vile,  
Yea, it is burning in me like a sin,  
That when my love was absent, thy desire  
Shouldst trespass where my love is single lord.

*Ozias.*

This is but superstition. Love belongs  
To living souls. It is a light that kills

Shadows and ghosts haunting about the mind.  
 Yea, even now when death glooms so immense  
 Over the heaven of our being, Love  
 Would keep us white with day amid the dark  
 Down-coming of the storm, till the end took us.  
 And joy is never wasted. If we love,  
 Then although death shall break and bray our flesh,  
 The joy of love that thrilled in it shall fly  
 Past his destruction, subtle as fragrance, strong  
 And uncontrollable as fire, to dwell  
 In the careering onward of man's life,  
 Increasing it with passion and with sweetness.  
 Duty is on us therefore that we love  
 And be loved. Wert thou made to set alight  
 Such splendour of desire in man, and yet,  
 For a grave's sake, keep all thy beauty null,  
 And nothing be of good nor help to thy kind ?

*Judith.*

Help ? What help in me ?

*Ozias.*

To let go forth

The joy whereof thy beauty is the sign  
 Into the mind of man, and be therein  
 Courage of golden music and loud light  
 Against his enemies, the eternal dark  
 And silence.

*Judith.*

Ah, not thus. Yet—could I not help ?—  
 Why talk we ? What thing should I say to thee

To pierce the pride of lust wrapping thy heart ?  
How show thee that, as in maidens unloved  
There is virginity to make their sex  
Shrink like a wound from eyes of love untimely,  
So in a woman who hath learnt herself  
By her own beauty sacred in the clasp  
Of him whom her desire hath sacred made,  
There is a fiercer and more virgin wrath  
Against all eyes that come desiring her ?

*[A Psalm of many voices strikes their ears, and through  
the street pass old men chanting, followed and  
answered by a troop of young men.]*

*Chorus : Old Men.*

Wilt thou not examine our hearts, O Lord God of our  
strength ?  
Wilt thou still be blindly trying us ? Wilt thou not at  
length  
Believe the crying of our words, that never our knees  
have bent  
To foreign gods, nor any Jewish mouth or brain hath sent  
Prayers to beseech the favour of abominable thrones  
Worshipt by the heathen men with furnaces, wounds,  
and groans ?

*Young Men.*

And what good in our lives, strength or delighted glee,  
Hath God paid to purchase our purity ?  
Though lust starve in our flesh, still he devises fire  
To prove our lives pure as his fierce desire.  
With huge heathenish tribes roaring exultant here,  
Jewry fights as maid with a ravisher :

Tribes who better than we deal with the gods their lords,  
For they pleasantly sin, yet the gods sharpen and drive  
their swords.

*Old Men.*

Hast thou not tried us enough, Jehovah ? Hast thou  
found any fire  
Will draw from our hearts a smoke of burn'd idolatrous  
desire ?  
There is none in us, Lord : no other God in us but thee ;  
Only thy fires make our clean souls glitter with agony.  
Pure we are, pure in our prayers, pure our souls look to  
thee, Lord ;  
And to be shewn to the world devoured by evil is our  
reward.

*Young Men.*

We whose hearts were alone giving our God renown,  
Under the wheels of hell we are fallen down !  
False the heaven we built, fashion'd of purity ;  
'Tis heathen heavens, made out of sin, stand high.  
Come, make much of our God ! Comfort his ears with  
song,  
Lest his pride the gods with their laughter wrong,  
Seeing, huddled as beasts held by a fearful night  
Full of lions and hunger, his folk crouch to the heathen  
might.

*Old Men.*

Jehovah, still we refrain from crying to the infamous  
gates

That open easily into the heavens thy mind of jealousy  
hates.

Power is in them : hast thou no power ? Wilt thou not  
beware

Lest thy mood now press our minds to venturous despair ?

*Young Men.*

Fool'd, fool'd, fool'd are our lives, held by the world in  
jeer ;

With crazed eyes we behold veils of enormous fear  
Hiding dreadfully those marvellous gates and stairs  
Where the heathen delighted with sin throng with their  
prosperous prayers.

*Old Men.*

Yea, hung like the front of pestilent winds, thunderous  
dark before

The way into the heathen heavens, terrible curtains pour,  
Webs of black imagination and woven frenzy of sin ;  
And yet we know power on earth belongs to those within.

*Young Men.*

Yea, through Jehovah's jealousy,  
Burning dimly at last we see  
The great brass made like rigid flame,  
The gates of the heavens we dare not name.  
Take hold of wickedness ! Yea, have heart  
To tear the darkness of sin apart ;  
And find, beyond, our comforted sight  
Flash full of a glee of fiery light,—  
The gods the heathen know through sin,  
The gods who give them the world to win !

*Judith.*

This may I not escape. My world hath need  
 Of me who still hold God firm in my mind.  
 It is no matter if I fail : I must  
 Send the God in me forth, and yield to him  
 The shaping of whatever chance befall.—  
 Ozias ! hateful thou hast made thyself  
 To me ; for thou hast hatefully soiled my beauty,  
 My preciouslest, given me to attire my soul  
 For her long marriage festival of life.  
 Yet I must make request to thee, and thou  
 Must grant it. When the sun is down to-night,  
 Quietly set the main gate open : I  
 Will pass therethrough and treat with Holofernes.

*Ozias.*

What, wilt thou go to be murdered by these fiends ?

*Judith.*

Ask nothing, but do simply my request.

*Ozias.*

I will : so thou shalt know the reverent heart  
 I have for thee, although its worship thou  
 So bitterly despisest ; but thy will  
 Shall be a sacred thing for me to serve.  
 Thou hast thy dangerous demand, because  
 It is thou who askest, it is I who may  
 Grant it to thee,—this only ! Yea, I will send  
 Thy heedless body among risks that thou,

Looking alone at the great shining God  
Within thy mind, seest not ; but I see  
And sicken at them. Yet do I not require  
Thy purpose ; whether thy proud heart must have  
The wound of death from steel that has not toucht  
The peevish misery these Jews call blood ;  
Whether thy mind is for velvet slavery  
In the desires of some Assyrian lord——  
Forgive me, Judith ! there my love spoke, made  
Foolish with injury ; and I should be  
Unwise to stay here, lest it break the hold  
I have it in. I go, and I am humbled.  
But thou shalt have thy asking : the gate is thine.

[*He goes.*]

*Judith.*

How can it harm me more, to feel my beauty  
Read by man's eyes to mean his lust set forth ?  
Yea, Holofernes now can bring no shame  
Upon me that Ozias hath not brought.  
But this is chief : what balancee can there be  
In my own hurt against a nation's pining ?  
God hath given me beauty, and I may  
Snare with it him whose trap now bites my folk.  
There is naught else to think of. Let me go  
And set those robes in order which best pleased  
Manasses' living eyes ; and let me fill  
My gown with jewels, such as kindle sight,  
And have some stinging sweetness in my hair.—  
Manasses, my Manasses, lost to me,  
Gone where my love can nothing search, and hidden  
Behind the vapours of these worldly years,

The many years between me and thy death ;  
Thine ears are sealed with immortal blessedness  
Against our miserable din of living ;  
Through thy pure sense goeth no soil of grief.  
Forgive me ! for thou hast left me here to be hurt  
And moved to pity by the dolour of men.  
The garment of my soul is splasht with sorrow,  
Sorrowful noise and sight ; and like to fires  
Of venom spat on me, the sorrow eats  
Through the thin robe of sense into my soul.  
And it is cried against me, this keen anguish,  
By my own people and my God's ;—and thou  
Didst love them. Therefore thou must needs forgive me,  
That I devise how this my beauty, this  
Sacred to thy long-dead joy of desire,  
May turn to weapon in the hand of God ;  
Such weapon as he hath taken aforetime  
To sword whole nations at a stroke to their knees,—  
Storms of the air and hilted fire from heaven,  
And sightless edge of pestilence hugely swung  
Down on the bulk of armies in the night.  
Such weapon in God's hand, and wielded so,  
A woman's beauty may be now, I pray ;  
A pestilence suddenly in this foreign blood,  
A blight on the vast growth of Assyrian weed,  
A knife to the stem of its main root, the heart  
Of Holofernes. God ! Let me hew him down,  
And out of the ground of Israel wither our plague !

## II

## BEFORE THE TENT OF HOLOFERNES

*Holofernes.*

Night and her admirable stars again !  
And I again envying her and questioning !  
What hast thou, Night, achieved, denied to me,  
That maketh thee so full of quiet stars ?  
What beauty has been mingled into thee  
So that thy depth burns with the peace of stars ?—  
I now with fires of uproarious heat,  
Exclaiming yellow flames and towering splendour  
And a huge fragrant smoke of precious woods,  
Must build against thy overlooking, Stars,  
And against thy terrible eternal news  
Of Beauty that burns quietly and pure,  
A lodge of wild extravagant earthly fire ;  
Even as under passions of fleshly pleasure  
I hide myself from my desiring soul.

[*Enter Guards with JUDITH.*

*Guard 1.*

We found this woman wandering in the trenches,  
And calling out, " Take me to Holofernes,  
Assyrians, I am come for Holofernes."

*Guard 2.*

She would not, for no words of ours, unveil,  
And something held us back from handling her.

*Guard 1.*

We think she must be beautiful, although  
She is so stubborn with that veil of hers.

*Guard 2.*

We minded my lord's word, that he be shewn  
All the seized women which are strangely fair.

*Holofernes.*

Take off thy veil.

*Judith.*

I will not.

*Holofernes.*

Take thy veil  
From off thy face, Jewess, or thou straight goest  
To entertain my soldiers.

*Judith.*

I will not.

*Holofernes.*

Am I to tear it, then ?

*Judith.*

My lord, thou durst not.

*Holofernes.*

Ha, there is spirit here. I have the whim,  
Jewess, almost to believe thee : I dare not !  
But tell me who thou art.

*Judith.*

That shalt thou know  
Before the night has end.

*Holofernes.*

Take off thy veil.

*Judith.*

Alone for Holofernes am I come.

*Holofernes.*

And there is only Holofernes here.  
These fellows are but thoughts of mine ; my whole  
Army, that treads down all the earth and breaks  
The banks of fending rivers into marsh,  
Is nought but my forth-going imagination.  
Where I am, there is no man else : if I  
Appeared before thee in a throng of spears,  
I'd stand alone before thee, girt about  
By powers of my mind made visible.

*Judith.*

For captured peasants or for captured kings  
Such words would have the right big sound. But I  
Am woman, and I hear them not : I say  
I will not, before any man but thee,  
Make known my face ; I am only for thee.  
When I have thee alone and in thy tent  
I will unveil.

*Holofernes (to the Guards).*

What ! Staring ?—Hence, you dogs !

## III

## IN THE TENT OF HOLOFERNES

*Holofernes (alone with Judith).*

Thou art the woman ! Thou hast come to me !—  
O not as I thought ! not with senses blazing  
Far into my deep soul abiding calm  
Within their glory of knowledge, as the vast  
Of night behind her outward sense of stars.  
Now am I but the place thy beauty brightens,  
And of myself I have no light of sense  
Nor certainty of being : I am made  
Empty of all my wont of life before thee,  
A vessel where thy splendour may be poured,  
After the way the great vessel of air  
Accepts the morning power of the sun.  
Now nothing I have known of me remains,  
Save that within me, far as the world is high  
Beneath this dawn that gilds my spirit's air,  
Some depth, more inward even than my soul,  
Troubles and flashes like the shining sea.

O Jewish woman, if thou knewest all  
The hunger and the tears the punisht world  
Suffers by cause of thee, and of my dream  
That thou wert somewhere hidden in mankind !  
I could not but obey my dream, and toil  
To break the nations and to sift them fine,  
Pounding them with my warfare into dust,  
And searching with my many iron hands

Through their destruction as through crumbs of marl,  
Until my palms should know the jewel-stone  
Betwixt them, the Woman who is Beauty,—  
Nature so long hath like a miser kept  
Buried away from me in this heap of Jews !  
Now that we twain might meet, women and men  
In every land where I have felt for thee  
Have taken desolation for their home,  
Crying against me,—and against thee unknowing.

Ah, but I had given over to despair  
The mind in me. I ground the stubborn tribes,  
I quarried them like rocks and broke them small  
And ground them down to flinders and to sands ;  
But never gleamed the jewel-stone therein,  
Naught but the common flint of earth I found.  
And in a dreary anger I kept on  
Assailing the whole kind of man, because  
Some manner of war my soul must needs inhabit.  
Like a man making himself in drunken sleep  
A king, my soul, drunk with its earthly war,  
Kept idle all its terrible want of thee,  
Believed itself managing arms with God ;  
Yea, when my trampling hurry through the earth  
Made cloudy wind of the light human dust,  
I thought myself to move in the dark danger  
Of blinding God's own face with blasts of war !  
Until my rage forgot his crime against me,  
His hiding thee, the beauty I had dreamt.  
Yea and I filled my flesh with furious pleasure,  
That in the noise of it my soul should hear  
No whispering thought of desperate desire.

Nevertheless, I knew well that my heart's

Sightless imagination lifted his face  
 Continually awake for news of thee.  
 But 'twas infirm and crazy waking, like  
 As when a starving sentry, put to guard  
 The sleep of a broken soldiery that flees  
 Through winter of wild hills from hounding foes,  
 Hath but the pain of frozen wounds, and fear  
 Feeding on his dark spirit, to watch withal.  
 And lo,  
 As suddenly, as blessedly thou comest  
 Now to my heart's unseeing watch for thee,  
 As out of the night behind him into the heart,  
 Drugg'd senseless with its ache, of that lost soldier  
 An arrow leaps, and ere the stab can hurt,  
 His frozen waking is the ease of death.  
 So I am killed by thee ; all the loud pain  
 Of pleasure that had lockt my heart in life,  
 Wherein with blinded and unhearing face  
 My hope of thee yet stood and strained to look  
 And listen for thy coming,—all this life  
 Is killed before thee ; yea, like marvellous death,  
 Spiritual sense invests my heart's desire ;  
 And round the quiet and content thereof,  
 The striving hunger of my fleshly sense  
 Fails like a web of hanging cloth in fire.—  
 Tell me now, if thou knowest, why thou hast come !

*Judith.*

Sufficeth not for us that I have come ?—  
 Let not unseemly things live in my mouth ;  
 Yet I would praise thee as thou praisest me,  
 But in a manner that my people use,

Things to approach in song they list not speak.  
And song, thou knowest, inwrought with chiming strings,  
Sweetens with sweet delay loving desire :

Also thine eyes will feed, and thy heart wonder.—

Balkis was in her marble town,  
And shadow over the world came down.  
Whiteness of walls, towers and piers,  
That all day dazzled eyes to tears,  
Turned from being white-golden flame,  
And like the deep-sea blue became.  
Balkis into her garden went ;  
Her spirit was in discontent  
Like a torch in restless air.  
Joylessly she wandered there,  
And saw her city's azure white  
Lying under the great night,  
Beautiful as the memory  
Of a worshipping world would be  
In the mind of a god, in the hour  
When he must kill his outward power ;  
And, coming to a pool where trees  
Grew in double greeneries,  
Saw herself, as she went by  
The water, walking beautifully,  
And saw the stars shine in the glance  
Of her eyes, and her own fair countenance  
Passing, pale and wonderful,  
Across the night that filled the pool.  
And cruel was the grief that played  
With the queen's spirit ; and she said :  
“ What do I hear, reigning alone ?  
For to be unloved is to be alone.

There is no man in all my land  
 Dare my longing understand ;  
 The whole folk like a peasant bows  
 Lest its look should meet my brows  
 And be harmed by this beauty of mine.  
 I burn their brains as I were sign  
 Of God's beautiful anger sent  
 To master them with punishment  
 Of beauty that must pour distress  
 On hearts grown dark with ugliness.  
 But it is I am the punisht one.  
 Is there no man, is there none,  
 In whom my beauty will but move  
 The lust of a delighted love ;  
 In whom some spirit of God so thrives  
 That we may wed our lonely lives ?  
 Is there no man, is there none ?"—  
 She said, " I will go to Solomon."

*Holofernes.*

I shall not bear it : dreamed, it hath made my life  
 Fail almost, like a storm broken in heaven  
 By its internal fire ; and now I feel  
 Love like a dreadful god coming to do  
 His pleasure on me, to tear me with his joy  
 And shred my flesh-wove strength with merciless  
 Utterance through me of inhuman bliss.—  
 I must have more divinity within me.—  
 Come to me, slave !      [*Calling out to his attendants.*

*Judith.*

Thou callest someone ? Alas !  
 O, where's my veil ?—Cry him to stay awhile !—

*Holofernes.*

Thou troubled with such whimsy !—But 'tis no one,  
A mere sexless thing of mine.

*Judith.*

He is coming !

I threw my veil—where ?—I must bow my face  
Close to the ground, or his eyes will find me out ;  
And—O my lord, hold him back with thy voice !

[*She has knelt down.*]

Hold him in doubt to enter a moment, while  
I loosen my hair into some manner of safety  
Against his prying.

*Holofernes.*

Slave, dost thou hear me ? Come !—

I marvel, room for such a paltering mood  
Should be within thy mind, now so nearly  
Deified with the first sense of my love.

[*A Eunuch comes in.*]

*Holofernes.*

Wine ! The mightiest wine my sutlers have ;  
Wine with the sun's own grandeur in it, and all  
The wildness of the earth conceiving Spring  
From the sun's golden lust : wine for us twain !  
And when thou hast brought it, burn anear my bed  
Storax and cassia ; and let wealth be found  
To cover my bed with such strife of colour,  
Crimson and tawny and purple-inspired gold,  
That eyes beholding it may take therefrom  
Splendid imagination of the strife  
Of love with love's implacable desire.

*Judith (still kneeling).*

I must lean on thee now, my God ! A weight  
Of pitiable weakness thou must bear  
And move as it were thine own strength ; tell my heart  
How not to sicken in abomination,  
Show me the way to loathe this vile man's rage,  
Now close to seize me into the use of his pleasure,  
With the loathing that is terrible delight.  
So that not fainting, but refresht and astonisht  
And strangely spirited and divinely angry  
My body may arise out of its passion,  
Out of being enjoyed by this fiend's flesh.  
Then man my arm ; then let mine own revenge  
Utter thy vengeance, Lord, as speech doth meaning ;  
Yea, with hate empower me to say bravely  
The glittering word that even now thy mind  
Purposes, God,—the swift stroke of a falchion !

*Holofernes.*

Woman, beloved, why art thou fixt so long  
Kneeling and downward crookt, and in thy hair  
Darkened ?—Ah, thy shoulders urging shape  
Of loveliness into thy hair's pouring gleam !

*Judith.*

Needs must I pray my Jewish God for help  
Against my bridal joys. For I do fear them.

*Holofernes.*

I also : these are the joys that fear doth own.

## IV

*At the Gate of Bethulia. On the walls, on either side of the Gate, are citizens watching the Assyrian camp ; OZIAS also, standing by himself.*

*Ozias.*

When wilt thou cure thyself, spirit of the earth,  
When wilt thou cure thyself of thy long fever,  
That so insanely doth ferment in thee ?—  
'Tis not man only : the whole blood of life  
Is fever'd with desire. But as the brain,  
Being lord of the body, is served by blood  
So well that a hidden canker in the flesh  
May send, continuous as a usury,  
Its breeding venom upward, till in the brain  
It vapour into enormity of dreaming :  
So man is lord of life upon the earth ;  
And like a hastening blood his nature wells  
Up out of the beasts below him, they the flesh  
And he the brain, they serving him with blood ;  
And blood so loaden with brute lust of being  
It steams the conscious leisure of man's thought  
With an immense phantasma of desire,  
An unsubduable dream of unknown pleasure ;  
Which he sends hungering forth into the world,  
But never satisfied returns to him.  
Who hath found beauty ? Who hath not desired it ?  
'Tis but the feverish spirit of earthly life  
Working deliriously in man, a dream

Questing the world that throngs upon man's mind  
 To find therein an image of herself ;  
 And there is nothing answers her entreaty.—

I climb towards death : it is not falling down  
 For me to die, but up the event of the world  
 As up a mighty ridge I climb, and look  
 With lifted vision backward down on life.  
 So high towards death I am gone, listless I gaze  
 Where on the earth beneath me, into the fires  
 Of that Assyrian strength, our siege of fate,  
 Judith, the dream of my desire of beauty,  
 Goes daring forth, to shape herself therein,  
 Seeking to fashion in its turbulence  
 Some deed that will be likeness of herself.  
 For now I know her purpose : and I know  
 She will be murdered there. Against the world  
 The beauty I have lived in, my loved dream,  
 Goes, wild to master the world ; and she will  
 Therefore be murdered. It is nothing now ;  
 Wind from the heights of death is on my brow.

*Talk among the other watchers.*

It must be, God is for us. Such a mind  
 As this of Judith's could not be, unless  
 God had spoken it into her. She is  
 His special voice, to tell the Assyrians  
 Terrible matters.

Is she God's ? I think  
 'Tis Holofernes hath her now.

If not,  
 Upon his soldiers he hath lavisht her.

Not he. Now they have known her, his filled senses  
Never will leave go our wonderful Judith.

Ay, wonderful in Jewry. But there are  
In Babylon women so beautiful,  
They make men's spirits desperate, to know  
Flesh cannot ever minister enough  
Delight to ease the craving they are taskt with.

Who talks of Babylon when God even now  
Is training her fierce champion, Holofernes,  
Into the death a woman holds before him ?

A woman killing Holofernes !

Ay ;

Be she abused by him or not, I know  
God means to give her marvellous hands to-night.  
I know it by my heart so strangely sick  
With looking out for the first drowsy stir  
In that huge flaming quiet of the camp.  
Now fearfuller qualm than famine eagerly  
Handles my life and pulls at it,—my faith's  
Hunger for being fed with sounds and visions :  
The firelight mixt with a trooping bustle of shadows,  
The silence suddenly shouting with surprise,  
That tells of men astounded out of sleep  
To find that God hath dreadfully been among them.

We have mistaken Judith.

Even as now  
God is mistaken by your doubting hearts.

She that has dealt with such a pride of spirit  
In all her ways of life, so that she seemed  
To feel like shadow, falling on the light  
Her own mind made, the common thoughts of men ;  
Ay, she that to-day came down into our woe  
And stood among the griefs that buzz upon us,  
Like one who is forced aside from a bright journey  
To stoop in a small-room'd cottage, where loud flies  
Pester the inmates and the windows darken ;  
This she, this Judith, out of her quiet pride,  
And out of her guarded purity, to walk  
Where God himself from violent whoredom could  
Scarcely preserve her shuddering flesh ! and all  
For our sake, for the lives she hath in scorn,  
This horrible Assyrian risk she ventures.

There should be prayer for that. Let us ask God  
To bind the men, whose greed now glares upon her,  
In some strange feebleness ; surely he will ;  
Surely not with woman's worst injury  
Her noble obedience he will reward !  
Let us ask God to bind these men before her.

They are not his to bind : else, were they here ?  
They are the glorying of Nebuchadnezzar's  
Heart of fury against our God, sent here  
Like insolent shouting into his holy quiet.  
God could not bind these bragging noises up

In Nebuchadnezzar's heart ; it is not his,  
But made by Babylonian gods or owned  
By thrones that hold the heavens over Nineveh.  
For all these outland greatnesses, these kings  
Whose war goes pealing through the world, these  
towns

Infidel and triumphant, reaching forth  
Armies to hug the world close to their lust,—  
What are they but the gods making a scorn  
Of our God on the earth ? Then how can he  
Alter these men from wicked delight ? or how  
Keep Judith all untoucht among their hands,  
When his own quietness he could not keep  
Unbroken by the god's Assyrian insult ?

But with a thunder he can shatter this  
Intruding noise, and make his quiet again.

And in their lust he can entangle them,  
Deceiving them far into Judith's beauty,  
Which is his power, and lop them from their gods.

Their outrage will be ornament upon her !

Out of the hands of the goblins she will come  
Not markt with shame, but wearing their vile usage  
Like one whom earthly reign covers with splendour.

The ignominy they thought of shall be turned  
To shining, yea, to announcing through the world  
How God hath used her to beguile the heathen.

It begins ! Now it begins ! Lo, how dismay  
 Is fallen on the camp in a strange wind :  
 The ground, that seemed as spread with yellow embers,  
 Leaps into blazing, and like cinders whirled  
 And scattered up among the flames, are black  
 Bands of frantic men flickering about !

Ozias ! seest thou how our enemies  
 Are labouring in amazement ? How they run  
 Flinging fuel to light them against fear ?

Now they begin to roar their terror : now  
 They wave and beckon wordless desperate things  
 One to another.

Hear the iron and brass  
 Ringing above their voices, as they snatch  
 The arms that seem to fight among themselves,  
 Seized by their masters' anguish ; dost thou hear  
 The clumsy terror in the camp, the men  
 Hasting to arm themselves against our God,  
 Ozias ?

*Ozias.*

Lions have taken a sentinel.

*A Citizen.*

Judith hath taken Holofernes.

*Judith's voice outside, under the gate.*

Yea,

And brought him back with her. Open the gates

*The Citizens.*

Open the gates. Bring torches. Wake, ye Jews !  
Hail, Judith, marvellously chosen woman !  
How bringst thou Holofernes ? Show him to us.

*Judith.*

Dare you indeed behold him ?

*A Citizen.*

Is he bound ?

*Judith.*

Drugged rather, with a medicine that God  
Prepared for him and gave into my hands.  
Open the gates ! It is a harmless thing,  
The Holofernes I have made your show ;  
You may gaze blithely upon him. I have tamed  
The man's pernicious brain. Open the gates !  
What, are your hands still nerveless ? But my hands,  
The hands of a woman, have done notable work.

*The Gates open. JUDITH appears, standing against  
the night and the Assyrian fires. Torches and  
shouting in the town.*

*Citizens.*

Judith ! Judith alone ! Where is thy boast  
Of Holofernes captured ?

*Judith.*

I am alone,  
Indeed ; and you are many ; yet with me  
Comes Holofernes, certainly a captive.

*Ozias.*

What trifle is this ?

*Judith.*

Trifle ? It is the word.

A trifle, a thing of mere weight, I have brought you  
From the Assyrian camp. My apron here  
Is loaded now more heavily, but as meanly  
As an old witch's skirt, when she comes home  
From seeking camel's-dung for kindling ; yet  
My burden was, an hour ago, the world  
Where you were ground to tortures ; it was the brain  
Inventing your destruction.—Look you now !

*[Holding up the head of HOLOFERNES.]*

This is the mouth through which commandment came  
Of massacre and damnation to the Jews ;  
Here was the mind the gods that hate our God  
Used to empower the agonies they devised  
Against us ; here your dangers were all made,  
Your horrible starvation ; and the thirst  
Those wicked gods supposed would murder you,  
Here a creature became, a ravenous creature ;  
Yea, here those mighty vigours lived which took,  
Like ocean water taking frost, the hate  
Those gods have for Jehovah, shaping it  
Atrociously into the war that clencht —  
Their fury about you, frozen into iron.  
Jews, here is the head of Holofernes : take it  
And let it grin upon our highest wall  
Over against the camp of the Assyrians.

*[She throws them the head]*

Ay, you may worry it ; now is the jackals' time ;  
Snarl on your enemy, now he is dead.

*Ozias.*

Judith, be not too scornful of their noise.  
There are no words may turn this deed to song :  
Praise cannot reach it. Only with such din,  
Unmeasured yelling exultation, can  
Astonishment speak of it. In me, just now,  
Thought was the figure of a god, firm standing,  
A dignity like carved Egyptian stone ;  
Thou like a blow of fire hast splinter'd it ;  
It is abroad like powder in a wind,  
Or like heapt shingle in a furious tide,  
Thou having roused the ungovernable waters  
My mind is built amidst, a dangerous tower.  
My spirit therein dwelling, so overwhelmed  
In joy or fear, disturbance without name,  
Out of the rivers it is fallen in  
Can snatch no substance it may shape to words  
Answerable to thy prowess and thy praise.  
We are all abasht by thee, and only know  
To worship thee with shouts and astounded passion.

*Judith.*

Yes, now the world has got a voice against me :  
At last now it may howl a triumph about me.

*Ozias.*

This, nevertheless, my thought can seize from out  
The wildness that goes pouring past it. God,

Wondrously having moved thee to this deed,  
 Hath shown the Jews a wondrous favouring love.  
 Thee it becomes not, standing though thou art  
 On this high action, to think scorn of men  
 Whom God thinks worthy of having thee for saviour.

*Judith.*

This is a subtle flattery. What know I  
 Of whom God loves, of whom God hates ? I know  
 This only : in my home, in my soul's chamber,  
 A filthy verminous beast hath made his lair.  
 I let him in ; I let this grim lust in ;  
 Not only did not bolt my doors against  
 His forcing, but even put them wide and watcht  
 Him coming in, to make my house his stable.  
 What though I killed him afterward ? All my place,  
 And all the air I live in, is foul with him.  
 I killed him ? Truly, I am mixt with him ;  
 Death must have me before it hath all him.

*Ozias.*

In thee, too, are the floods, the wild rivers,  
 Overrunning thy thought, the nameless mind ?  
 How else, indeed ? Nay, we are dull with joy :  
 Of thee we thought not, out of the hands of outrage  
 Coming back, although with victory coming.  
 But this makes surety once more of my thought,  
 And gives again my reason its lost station ;  
 For it may come now in my privilege  
 (A thing that could cure madness in my brain)  
 That thou from me persuasion hast to endure  
 What well I know thy soul, thy upright soul,

Feels as abominable harness on it  
Fastening thee unwillingly to crime,—  
The wickedness that hath delighted in thee.

*Judith.*

Ay ? Art thou there already ? Tasting, art thou,  
What the Assyrians may have forced on me,  
Ere thou hast well swallowed thy new freedom ?  
Indeed, I know this is the wine of the feast  
Which I have set for thee and thy Bethulia ;  
And 'tis the wine makes delicate the banquet.

*Ozias.*

Wait : listen to me. 'Tis I now must be wise  
And thou the hearkener. Not without wound  
(So I make out, at least, thy hurrying words)  
Comest thou back to us from conquering.  
And such a wound, I easily believe,  
As eats into thy soul and rages there ;  
Yea, I that know thee, Judith, know thy soul  
Worse rankling hath in it from heathen insult  
Than flesh could take from steel bathed in a venom  
Art magic brewed over a charcoal fire,  
Blown into flame by hissing of whipt lizards.  
Yet is it likely, by too much regarding,  
Thy hurt is pamper'd in its poisonous sting.  
Wounds in the spirit need no surgery  
But a mind strong not to insist on them.  
See, then, thou hast not too much horror of this ;  
Who that fights well in battle comes home sound ?—  
Much less couldst thou, who must, with seeming weakness,  
Invite the power of Holofernes forth

Ere striking it, thy womanhood the ambush.  
 For thou didst plan, I guess, to duel him  
 In snares, weaving his greed about his limbs,  
 Drawn out and twisted winding round his strength  
 By ministry of thy enticing beauty ;  
 That when he thought himself spending on thee  
 Malicious violence, and thou hadst made him  
 Languish, stupid with boasting and delight,  
 Thy hands might find him a tied quiet vietim  
 Under their anger, maiming him of life.  
 Now, thy device accomplit, wilt thou grudge  
 Its means ? Wilt thou scruple to understand  
 Thy abus'd sex will show upon thy fame  
 A nobler colour of glory than a soldier's  
 Wounded bravery rusting his habergeon ?  
 Nay, will not the world rejoice, thou being found  
 Among its women, ready such insolence  
 To bear as is unbearable to think on,  
 Thereby to serve and save God and his people ?

*Judith.*

The world rejoice over me ? Yea, I am certain.

*Ozias.*

Then art thou too fastidious. It is weak  
 To make thyself a shame of being injured ;  
 And is it injury indeed ? Nay, is it  
 Anything but a mere opinion hurt ?  
 Not thou, but customary thought is here  
 Molested and annoyed ; the only nerve  
 Can carry anguish from this to thy soul,  
 Is that credulity which ties the mind

Firmly to notional creature as to real.

Advise thee, then ; dark in thyself keep hid

This grief ; and thou wilt shortly find it dying.

*A Citizen.*

Judith,

Pardon our ecstasy. 'Tis time thou hadst

Our honour. But first tell us all the event,

That in thy proper height thou with thy deed

May stand against our worship.

*Judith.*

Why do you stop  
Your shouts, and glare upon me ? Have you need  
Truly to hear my tale ? I think, not so.  
Ozias here, as he hath whiled at ease  
Upon the walls my stay in the camp yonder,  
Hath fairly fancied all that I have done,  
And more exactly, and with a relishing gust,  
All that was done to me. Ask him, therefore ;  
If he hath not already entertained  
Your tedious leisure with my story told  
Pat to your liking, enjoyed, and glosst with praise.—  
And yet, why ask him ? Why go even so far  
To hear it ? Ask but the clever libidinousness  
Dwelling in each of your hearts, and it will surely  
Imagine for you how I trained to my arms  
Lewd Holofernes, and kept him plied with lust,  
Until his wild blood in the end paused fainting,  
And he lay twitching, drained of all his wits ;—  
But there was wine as well working in him,  
Feebling his sinews ; 'twas not all my doing,

The snoring fit that came before his death,  
 The routing beastly slumber that was my time.  
 You know it all ! Why ask me for the tale ?

*Ozias.*

Comfort her : praise her. She is strangely ashamed  
 Of Holofernes having evilly used her.

*A Citizen.*

We will contrive the triumph of our joy  
 Into some tune of words, and bring thee on,  
 Accompanied by singing, to thy house.

*Judith.*

I pray you, rather let me go alone.  
 You will do better to be searching out  
 All sharpen'd steel that may take weapon-use.  
 The Assyrians are afraid : it is your time.

*[They surround JUDITH and go with her.]*

CHORUS *of Citizens praising JUDITH and  
 leading her to her house.*

Over us and past us go the years ;  
 Like wind that taketh sound from jubilee  
 And aloud flieth ringing,  
 Over us goeth the speed of the years,  
 Like loud noise eternally bringing  
 The greatness women have done.

Deborah was great ; with her singing  
 She hearten'd the men that the horses had dismayed ;  
 Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, alone

Stood singing where the men were horribly afraid,  
Singing of God in the midst of fear ;  
When archers out of Hazor were  
Eating the land like grasshoppers,  
And darkness at noon was plundering the air  
Of the light of the sun's insulted fires,  
Red darkness covering Sisera's host  
As Jewry was covered by the Canaanite's boast :  
For the earth was broken into dust beneath  
The force of his chariots' thundering tyres,  
Nine hundred chariots of iron.

Deborah was great in her prophesying ;  
But, though her anger moved through the Israelites,  
And the loose tribes her indignant crying  
Bound into song, fashion'd to an army ;  
And before the measure of her song went flying,  
Like leaves and breakage of the woods  
Fallen into pouring floods,  
The iron and the men of Sisera and Jabin ;  
Not by her alone  
God's punishment was done  
On Canaan intending a monstrous crime,  
On the foaming and poison of the serpent in Hazor ;  
Two women were the power of God that time.

Yea, and sullenly down  
Into its hiding town,  
Even though the lightning were still in its heart,  
The broken dragon, drawing in its fury,  
Had croucht to mend its shatter'd malice,  
Had lifted its head again and spat against God.  
But God its endlessly devising brain,  
Its braving spirit, its captain Sisera,

Into the hands of another woman brought :  
 In nets of her persuasion  
 She that wild spirit caught,  
 She fasten'd up that uncontrollable thought.  
 Sisera spake, and the crops were flames ;  
 Sisera lookt, and blood ran down the door-sills.  
 But weary, trusting his entertainment,  
 He came to Jael, the Kenite woman ;  
 A woman who gave him death for a bed,  
 And with base tools nailed down his murderous head  
 Fast to the earth his rage had fed  
 With men unreckonably slain.

But than these wonderfully greater,  
 Judith, art thou ;  
 The praise of both shall follow like a shadow  
 After thy glory now,  
 Who alone the measureless striding,  
 The high ungovern'd brow,  
 Of Assur upon the hills of the world  
 Hast tript and sent him hugely sliding,  
 Like a shot beast, down from his towering,  
 By his own lamed  
 Mightiness hurl'd  
 To lie a filth in disaster.  
 Deborah and Jael, famously named,  
 Like rich lands enriching the city their master,  
 Bring thee now their most golden honour.  
 For the beauty of thy limbs was found  
 By a dreadfuller enemy dreadful as the sound  
 Of Deborah's singing, though hers was a song  
 That had for its words thousands of men.  
 But thou thyself, looking upon them,

Didst weaken the Assyrians mortally.  
They thought it terrible to see thee coming ;  
They falter'd in their impiousness,  
Their hearts gave in to thee ; they went  
Backward before thee and shewed thee the tent  
Where Holofernes would have thee in to him,  
Yea, for his slayer waiting,  
Waiting thee to entertain,  
Desiring thee, his death, to enjoy, as Jael  
Waited for Sisera her slain.

*Judith.*

Have done ! Do you think I know not why your souls  
Are so delighted round me ? Do you think  
I see not what it is you praise ?—not me,  
But you yourselves triumphing in me and over me.

*A Citizen.*

Did we kill Holofernes ?

*Judith.*

No : nor I.

That corpse was not his death. He is alive,  
And will be till there is no more a world  
Filled with his hidden hunger, waiting for souls  
That ford the monstrous waters of the world.  
Alive in you is Holofernes now,  
But fed and rejoicing ; I have filled your hunger.  
Yea, and alive in me : my spirit hath been  
Enjoyed by the lust of the world, and I am changed  
Vilely by the vile thing that clutcht on me,  
Like sulphurous smoke eating into silver.

Your song is all of this, this your rejoicing ;  
 You have good right to circle me with song !  
 You are the world, and you have fed on me.

*A Citizen.*

We are the world ; yes, but the world for ever  
 Honouring thee.

*Judith.*

How am I honoured so,  
 If I no honour have for the world, but rather  
 Hold it an odious and traitorous thing,  
 That means no honour but to those whose spirits  
 Have yielded to its ancient lechery ?—  
 Defiled, defiled !

*A Citizen.*

Thou wert moved by our grief :  
 Was that a vile thing ?

*Judith.*

That was the cunning world.  
 It moved me by your grief to give myself  
 Into the pleasure of its ravenous love.

*A Citizen.*

Judith, if thy hot spirit beareth still  
 Indignant suffering of villainy,  
 Think, that thou hast no wrong from it. Such things  
 Are in themselves dead, and have only life  
 From what lives round them. And around thee glory  
 Lives and will force its splendour on the harm

Thy purity endured, making it shine  
Like diamond in sunlight, as before  
Unviolated it could not.

*Judith.*

Ay, to you  
I doubt not I seem admirable now,  
Worthy of being sung in loudest praise ;  
But to myself how seem I ?

*A Citizen.*

Surely as one  
Whose charity went down the stairs of hell,  
And barter'd with the fiends thy sacredest  
For our deliverance.

*Judith.*

And that you praise !—  
I was a virgin spirit. Whence I come  
I know not, and I care not whither I go.  
One fearful knowledge holds me : that I am  
A spirit walking dangerously here.  
For the world covets me. I am alone,  
And made of something which the world has not,  
Unless its substance can devour my spirit.  
And it hath devoured me ! In Holofernes  
It seized me, fed on me ; and then gibed on me,  
With show of his death scoffing at my rage,—  
His death !—He lay there, drunken, glutted with me,  
And his bare falchion hung beside the bed,—  
Look on it, and look on the blood I made  
Go pouring thunder of pleasure through his brain !—  
And like a mad thing hitting at the madness

Thronging upon it in a grinning rout,  
 I my defilement smote, that Holofernes.  
 But does a maniac kill the frenzy in him,  
 When with his fists he beats the clambering fiends  
 That swarm against his limbs ? No more did I  
 Kill my defilement ; it was fast within me ;  
 And like a frenzy can go out of me  
 And dress its hideous motions in my world.  
 For when I come back here, behold the thing  
 I murdered in the camp leaps up and yells !  
 The carrion Holofernes, my defilement,  
 Dances a triumph round me, roars and rejoices,  
 Quickened to hundreds of exulting lives.

*A Citizen.*

God help thee in this wildness ! Are we then  
 As Holofernes to thee ?

*Judith.*

You are naught  
 But the defilement that is in me now,  
 Rejoicing to be lodged safely within me.  
 You are the lust I entertained, rejoicing  
 To wreak itself upon my purity.  
 The stratagems of my ravishment you are,  
 Rejoicing that the will you serve has dealt  
 Its power on me. O, I hate you not.  
 You and your crying grief should have blown past  
 My heart like wind shaking a fasten'd casement.  
 But I must have you in. Myself I loathe  
 For opening to you, and thereby opening  
 To the demon which had set you on to whine

Pitiably in the porches of my spirit.  
You are but noise ; but he is the lust of the world,  
The infinite wrong the spirit, the virgin spirit,  
Must fasten against, or be for ever vile.

*A Citizen.*

But is it naught that we, the folk of God,  
Are safe by thee ?

*Judith.*

God hath his own devices.  
But I would be God's helper ! I would be  
Known as the woman whom his strength had chosen  
To ruin the Assyrians !—O my God,  
How dreadfully thou punishest small sins !  
If it is thou who punishest ; but rather  
It is that, when we slacken in perceiving  
The world's intent towards us, and fatally,  
Enticed out of suspicion by fair signs,  
Go from ignoring its proposals, down  
To parley,—thou our weakness dost permit.  
In all my days I from the greed of the world  
Virginal have kept my spirit's dwelling,—  
Till now ; yea, all my being I have maintained  
Sacredly my own possession ; for love  
But made more beautiful and more divine  
My spirit's ownership. And yet no warning,  
When I infatuate went down to be  
Procuress of myself to the world's desire,  
Did God blaze on my blindness, no rebuke.  
Therefore I am no more my virgin own,  
But hatefully, unspeakably, the world's.

To these now I belong ; they took me and used me.  
 I have no pride to live for ; and why else  
 Should one stay living, if not joyfully proud ?  
 For I have yielded now ; mercilessly  
 What is makes foolish nothing of what was.  
 To know the world, for all its grasping hands,  
 For all its heat to utter its pent nature  
 Into the souls that must go faring through it,  
 Availing nothing against purity,  
 Made always like rebellion trodden under,—  
 By this was life a noble labour. Now  
 I have been persuaded into the world's pleasure :  
 And now at last I will all certainly  
 Contrive for myself the death of Holofernes.

[OZIAS comes behind her and catches the lifted falchion.

*Judith.*

It was well done, Ozias.

*Ozias.*

I have watcht  
 Thy anguish growing, and I lookt for this.

*Judith.*

Thou knowest me better than I know myself.  
 What moves in me is strange and uncontrolled,  
 That once I thought was ruled : thou knew'st me  
 better.—

Indeed thou must forgive me ; what was I  
 To take so bitterly thy suit ? What right  
 Had I to give thee anger, when thou wouldst

Brighten thy hopeless death with me enjoyed,  
I, even from that anger, going to be  
Holofernes' pleasure ?—Thou knewest me better,  
And therefore shalt forgive me. Ay, no doubt  
My spirit answered thee so fiercely then  
Because it felt thee reading me aright,  
How a mere bragging was my purity.  
But now to pardon askt, I must add thanks.—  
I had forgot Manasses ! Even love  
Was driven forth of me by these loud mouths !  
Whether in death he waits for me, I know not ;  
But it had been an unforgivable thing  
To have made this the end ; not to have gone  
To death as unto spousals, leaving life  
As one sets down a work faithfully done,  
And knows oneself by service justified,  
Worthy of love, whether love be or not.  
But, soiled with detestation, to have thrown  
Fiercely aside the garment of this light ;  
Proved at the last impatient, death desiring  
Like a mere doffing of foul drenchèd clothes ;  
Release from the wicked hindering mire of sorrow ;  
A comfortable darkness hiding me  
Out of the glowing world myself have made  
An insult, domineering me with splendour ;—  
O such a death had turned, past all forgiving,  
My insult to Manasses, and searcht him out,  
Even where he is quiet, with the blaze,  
Ranging like din, of this contempt, this triumph.  
Not crying out such hateful news should I  
Flee hunted into death, unto my love.  
From this, Ozias, thou hast saved me. Now

I am to learn my shame, that not amazed,  
 But practised in my burden, I at last,  
 When my time comes, may all in gladness fare  
 The road made sacred by Manasses' feet.

[JUDITH goes into her house.]

*Ozias (addressing the citizens).*

You do well to be stricken silent here.  
 Terrible Holofernes slain by a woman  
 Was something wonderful, to be noised aloud ;  
 But this is a wonder past applauding thought,  
 This grief darkening Judith, in the midst  
 Of the new shining glory she herself  
 Has brought to conquer in our skies the storm.  
 You do well to be dumb : for you have seen  
 Virginitv. That spirit you have seen,  
 Seen made wrathfully plain that secret spirit,  
 Whereby is man's frail scabbard filled with steel.  
 This, cumbered in the earthen kind of man,  
 Which ceaseless waters would be wearing down,  
 Alone giveth him stubborn substance, holds him  
 Upright and hard against impious fate.  
 All things within it would the world possess,  
 And have them in the tide of its desire :  
 Man hath his nature of the vehement world ;  
 He is a torrent like the stars and beasts  
 Flowing to answer the fierce world's desire.  
 But like a giant wading in the sea  
 Stands in the rapture, and refusing it,  
 And looking upward out of it to find  
 Who knows what sign ?—spirit, virginity ;  
 A power caught by the power of the world ;

The spirit in whose unknown hope doth man  
Deny the mastery of his fortune here ;  
Virginitie, whose pride, impassion'd only  
To be as she herself would be, nor thence  
To loosen for the world's endeavouring,  
And, though all give the rash obedience, stand  
Her own possession,—this virginitie,  
This pride of the spirit, asking no reward  
But to be pride unthrown, this is the force  
Whereby man hath his courage in the strange  
Fearful turmoil of being conscious man.  
Yea, worshipping this spirit, he will at last  
Grow into high divine imagination,  
Wherein the envious wildness of the world  
Yieldeth its striving up to him, and takes  
His mind, building the endless stars like stone  
To house his towering joy of self-possessing.  
This made you dumb ; ignorant knowledge of this,  
Blind vision of virginitie's mightiness,  
Did chide the exclamation in your hearts.  
And think not you have seen, in Judith's grief,  
Virginitie drown'd in the pouring world.  
For what is done is naught ; what is, is all :  
And Judith is virginitie's appointed.  
Even by her injury she sheweth us,  
As fire by violence may be revealed,  
How sovereign is virginitie.—  
But let us now consult what way her grief,  
Which is not to be understood by us,  
May spend itself, with naught to urge its power.  
Let us within our walls keep close this tale,  
Close as the famine and the thirst were kept

Devouring us by the Assyrians.

Let there be no news going through the land

Out of Bethulia but this : that we

At Judith's hands had our deliverance,

But she from Holofernes and his crew

Unwilling and astonisht reverence,

As they were men with minds opprest by God.

## THE ETERNAL WEDDING

*He.*

Even as a wind that hasteth round the world  
From out cold hours fill'd with shadow of earth,  
To pour alight against the risen sun ;  
So unto thee adoring, out of its shadow  
Floweth my spirit, into the light of thee  
Which Beauty is, and Joy. From my own fate,  
From out the darkness wherein long I fared  
Worshipping stars and morsels of the light,  
Through doors of golden morning now I pass  
Into the great whole light and perfect day  
Of shining Beauty, open to me at last.  
Yea, into thee now do I pass, beloved :  
Beauty and thou are mine !

*She.*

And I am thine !

I am desirable to my desire :  
Thence am I clean as immortality  
With Beauty and Joy, the fiery power of Beauty.

*He.*

And by my spirit made marvellous here by thee,  
Poured out all clear into the gold of thee,  
Not myself only do I know ; I have  
Golden within me the whole fate of man :

That every flesh and soul belongs to one  
 Continual joyward ravishment, whose end  
 Is here, in this perfection. Now I know—  
 For all my speculation soareth up,  
 A bird taking eternity for air,—  
 Now being mixt with thee, in the burning midst  
 Of Beauty for my sense and mind and soul,—  
 That life hath highest gone which hath most joy.  
 For like great wings forcefully smiting air  
 And driving it along in rushing rivers,  
 Desire of joy beats mightily pulsing forward  
 The world's one nature, and all the loose lives therein,  
 Carried and greatly streaming on a gale  
 Of craving, swept fiercely along in beauty ;—  
 Like a great weather of wind and shining sun,  
 When the airs pick up whole huge waves of sea,  
 Crumble them in their grasp and high aloft  
 Sow them glittering, a white watery dust,  
 To company with light : so we are driven  
 Onward and upward in a wind of beauty,  
 Until man's race be wielded by its joy  
 Into some high incomparable day,  
 Where perfectly delight may know itself,—  
 No longer need a strife to know itself,  
 Only by its prevailing over pain.

*She.*

Beloved, but no pain may strive with us.

*He.*

No, for we are flown far ahead of life :  
 The feet of our Spirit have wonderfully trod

The dangers of the rushing fate of life,  
As summer-searching birds tread with their wings  
Mountainous surges in the air. But many,  
Not strongly fledge to ride the world's great rapture,  
Must break, down fallen into steep confusion,  
Where we climb easily and tower with joy.  
Nevertheless doth life foretell in us  
How it shall all make seizure at the last  
Upon this height of ecstasy, this fort  
Life like an army storms : Captains we are  
In the great assault ; and where we stand alone  
Within these hours, built like establisht flames  
Round us, at long last all man's life shall stand  
At peace with joy, wearing delighted sense  
As meadows wear their golden pleasure of flowers.  
Certain my heart dwells in these builded hours,  
That there is no more beauty beyond thee.  
Thou art my utter beauty ; and—behold  
The marvel, God in Heaven !—I am thine.  
Therefore we know, in this height-guarded place  
Whereto the speed of our desire hath brought us ;  
Here in this safety crowning, like a fort  
Built upon topmost peaks, the height of beauty,—  
We know to be glad of life as we were gods  
Timelessly glad of deity ; yea, to enjoy  
Fleshly, spiritual Being till the swift  
Torrent of glee (as hurled star-dust can change  
Dim earthly weather to a moment like the sun,)  
Doth startle life to self-adoring godhead,—  
Divine body of Power and divine  
Burning soul of Light and self-desire.  
And having given ourselves all to amazement,

We are made like a prophesying song  
 Of life all joy, a bride in the arms of God.—  
 Yea, God shall marry his people at the last ;  
 And every man and woman who has sworn  
 That only joy can make this Being sacred,  
 Weaves at the wedding-garment.

*She.*

Ah, my beloved,

Feelest thou too that out of earth and time  
 We are transgressing into Heavenly hours ?  
 Or, threading the dark worldly multitude  
 And making lightning of its path, there comes  
 A zeal from God posting along our lives.

*He.*

For some eternal pulse hath chosen us,  
 Some divine anger beats within our hearts.

*She.*

Anger ? But how far off is love from anger !

*He.*

Nay, both belong to joy ; joy's kind is twain.  
 And close as in the pouring of sun-flame  
 Are mingled glory of light and fury of heat,  
 Joy utters its twin radiance, love and anger ;  
 If joy be not indeed all sacred wrath—  
 With circumstance ; indignant memory  
 Of what hath been, when the new lusts of God  
 Exulted unimaginably, before  
 Rigours of law fastened like creeping habit

Upon their measureless wont, and forced them drive  
Their ranging music of delighted being  
Through the fixt beating tune of a circling world.—  
Is not love so ? Amazement of an anger  
Against created shape and narrowness ?  
The bound rage of the uncreated Spirit  
Whose striving doth impassion us and the world ?  
A wrath that thou and I are not one being ?

*She.*

Yes, and not only words that thou and I  
Out of our sexes with a flame's escape  
Are fashioned into one. The Spirit in us  
Hath, like imagination in a prison,  
Kindled itself free of all boundary,  
So that it hath no room but its own joy,  
Ample as at the first, before it fell  
Into this burthenous habit of a world.  
What have we now to do with the world ? We are  
Made one unworldly thing ; we are past the world ;  
Yea, and unmade : we are immortality.

*He.*

And only fools abominably crazed,  
Those who will set imagination down  
As less in truth than their dim sensual wit,  
Dare doubt that, while these dreams of ours, these bodies,  
Still quiver in the world each with its own  
Delight, the great divine wrath of our love  
Hath stricken off from us the place of the world !  
Yea, as we walk in spiritual freedom  
Upright before the shining face of God,

Behold, as it were the shadow of our stature  
 Thrown by that light, we draw the world behind us,—  
 That world wherein, darkly I remember,  
 We thought we were as twain.

*She.*

Yet, since God means  
 That love should sunder our fixt separateness  
 And make our married spirits leap together,  
 As lightning out of the clouds of sexual flesh,  
 Into one sexless undivided joy ;  
 Why hath he made us a divided flesh ?  
 We being single ecstasy, now as strange  
 As if a shadow stained where no one stood  
 The ground in the noon-glare, seemeth to me  
 The long blind time wherein our lives and the world  
 Lay stretcht out dark upon the light of heaven,  
 Like shadow of some bulk that took the glory ;  
 While yet there stood not over it, to shade  
 The splendour from it, our heaven-fronting love,  
 This great new soul that our two souls have kindled.  
 Yea, and how like, that in the world's chance-medley  
 This our exulting destiny had been slain,  
 Though here it lords the world as a man his shadow !

*He.*

But the world is not chance, except to those  
 Most feeble in desire : who needeth aught  
 Shall have it, if he fill his soul with the need.  
 While still our ignorant lives were drowned beneath  
 The flooding of the earthly fate, and chance  
 Seemed pouring mightily dark and loud between us,

Unspeakable news oft visited our hearts :  
We knew each other by desire ; yea, spake  
Out of the strength of darkness flowing o'er us,  
Across the hindering outcry of the world  
One to another sweet desirable things.  
Until at last we took such heavenly lust  
Of those unheard messages into our lives,  
We were made abler than the worldly fate.  
We held its random enmity as frost  
The storming Northern seas, and fastened it  
In likeness of our love's imagining ;  
Or as a captain with his courage holds  
The mutinous blood of an army aghast with fear,  
And maketh it unwillingly dare his purpose,  
Our lust of love struck its commandment deep  
Into the froward turbulence of world  
That parted us. Suddenly the dark noise  
Cleft and went backward from us, and we stood  
Knowing each other in a quiet light ;  
And like wise music made of many strings  
Following and adoring underneath  
Prevailing song, fate lived beneath our love,  
Under the masterful excellent silence of it,  
A multitudinous obedience.

*She.*

Yea, but not this my marvel : not that we  
Should master with desire the sundering world,  
We who bore in our hearts such destiny,  
There was no force knew to be dangerous  
Against it, but must turn its malice clean  
Into obsequious favour worshipping us.

Rather hath this astonisht me, that we  
 Have not for ever lived in this high hour.  
 Only to be twin elements of joy  
 In this extravagance of Being, Love,  
 Were our divided natures shaped in twain ;  
 And to this hour the whole world must consent.  
 Is it not very marvellous, our lives  
 Can only come to this out of a long  
 Strange sundering, with the years of the world between  
 us ?

*He.*

Shall life do more than God ? for hath not God  
 Striven with himself, when into known delight  
 His unaccomplisht joy he would put forth,—  
 This mystery of a world sign of his striving ?  
 Else wherefore this, a thing to break the mind  
 With labouring in the wonder of it, that here  
 Being—the world and we—is suffered to be !—  
 But, lying on thy breast one notable day,  
 Sudden exceeding agony of love  
 Made my mind a trance of infinite knowledge.  
 I was not : yet I saw the will of God  
 As light unfashion'd, unendurable flame,  
 Interminable, not to be supposed ;  
 And there was no more creature except light,—  
 The dreadful burning of the lonely God's  
 Unutter'd joy. And then, past telling, came  
 Shuddering and division in the light :  
 Therein, like trembling, was desire to know  
 Its own perfect beauty ; and it became  
 A cloven fire, a double flaming, each

Adorable to each ; against itself  
Waging a burning love, which was the world ;—  
A moment satisfied in that love-strife  
I knew the world !—And when I fell from there,  
Then knew I also what this life would do  
In being twain,—in being man and woman !  
For it would do even as its endless Master,  
Making the world, had done ; yea, with itself  
Would strive, and for the strife would into sex  
Be cloven, double burning, made thereby  
Desirable to itself. Contrivèd joy  
Is sex in life ; and by no other thing  
Than by a perfect sundering, could life  
Change the dark stream of unappointed joy  
To perfect praise of itself, the glee that loves  
And worships its own Being. This is ours !  
Yet only for that we have been so long  
Sundered desire : thence is our life all praise.—  
But we, well knowing by our strength of joy  
There is no sundering more, how far we love  
From those sad lives that know a half-love only,  
Alone thereby knowing themselves for ever  
Sealed in division of love, and therefore made  
To pour their strength out always into their love's  
Fierceness, as green wood bleeds its hissing sap  
Into red heat of a fire ! Not so do we :  
The cloven anger, life, hath left to wage  
Its flame against itself, here turned to one  
Self-adoration.—Ah, what comes of this ?  
The joy falters a moment, with closed wings  
Wearying in its upward journey, ere  
Again it goes on high, bearing its song,

Its delight breathing and its vigour beating  
The highest height of the air above the world.

*She.*

What hast thou done to me !—I would have soul,  
Before I knew thee, Love, a captive held  
By flesh. Now, inly delighted with desire,  
My body knows itself to be nought else  
But thy heart's worship of me ; and my soul  
Therein is sunlight held by warm gold air.  
Nay, all my body is become a song  
Upon the breath of spirit, a love-song.

*He.*

And mine is all like one rapt faulty,  
As it were listening to the love in thee,  
My whole mortality trembling to take  
Thy body like heard singing of thy spirit.

*She.*

Surely by this, Beloved, we must know  
Our love is perfect here,—that not as holds  
The common dullard thought, we are things lost  
In an amazement that is all unware ;  
But wonderfully knowing what we are !  
Lo, now that body is the song whereof  
Spirit is mood, knoweth not our delight ?  
Knoweth not beautifully now our love,  
That Life, here to this festival bid come  
Clad in his splendour of worldly day and night,  
Filled and empower'd by heavenly lust, is all  
The glad imagination of the Spirit ?

*He.*

Were it not so, Love could not be at all :  
Nought could be, but a yearning to fulfil  
Desire of beauty, by vain reaching forth  
Of sense to hold and understand the vision  
Made by impassion'd body,—vision of thee !  
But music mixt with music are, in love,  
Bodily senses ; and as flame hath light,  
Spirit this nature hath imagined round it,  
No way concealed therein, when love comes near,  
Nor in the perfect wedding of desires  
Suffering any hindrance.

*She.*

Ah, but now,  
Now am I given love's eternal secret !  
Yea, thou and I who speak, are but the joy  
Of our for ever mated spirits ; but now  
The wisdom of my gladness even through Spirit  
Looks, divinely elate. Who hath for joy  
Our Spirits ? Who hath imagined them  
Round him in fashion'd radiance of desire,  
As into light of these exulting bodies  
Flaming Spirit is uttered ?

*He.*

Yea, here the end  
Of love's astonishment ! Now know we Spirit,  
And Who, for ease of joy, contriveth Spirit.  
Now all life's loveliness and power we have  
Dissolved in this one moment, and our burning

Carries all shining upward, till in us  
Life is not life, but the desire of God,  
Himself desiring and himself accepting.  
Now what was prophecy in us is made  
Fulfilment : we are the hour and we are the joy,  
We in our marvellousness of single knowledge,  
Of Spirit breaking down the room of fate  
And drawing into his light the greeting fire  
Of God,—God known in ecstasy of love  
Wedding himself to utterance of himself.

## MARRIAGE SONG

### I

Come up, dear chosen morning, come,  
Blessing the air with light,  
And bid the sky repent of being dark :  
Let all the spaces round the world be white,  
And give the earth her green again.  
Into new hours of beautiful delight,  
Out of the shadow where she has lain,  
Bring the earth awake for glee,  
Shining with dews as fresh and clear  
As my beloved's voice upon the air.  
For now, O morning chosen of all days, on thee  
A wondrous duty lies :  
There was an evening that did loveliness foretell ;  
Thence upon thee, O chosen morn, it fell  
To fashion into perfect destiny  
The radiant prophecy.  
For in an evening of young moon, that went  
Filling the moist air with a rosy fire,  
I and my beloved knew our love ;  
And knew that thou, O morning, wouldst arise  
To give us knowledge of achieved desire.  
For, standing stricken with astonishment,  
Half terrified in the delight,

Even as the moon did into clear air move  
And made a golden light,  
Lo there, croucht up against it, a dark hill,  
A monstrous back of earth, a spine  
Of hunched rock, furred with great growth of pine,  
Lay like a beast, snout in its paws, asleep ;  
Yet in its sleeping seemed it miserable,  
As though strong fear must always keep  
Hold of its heart, and drive its blood in dream.  
Yea, for to our new love, did it not seem,  
That dark and quiet length of hill,  
The sleeping grief of the world ?—Out of it we  
Had like imaginations stept to be  
Beauty and golden wonder ; and for the lovely fear  
Of coming perfect joy, had changed  
The terror that dreamt there !  
And now the golden moon had turned  
To shining white, white as our souls that burned  
With vision of our prophecy assured :  
Suddenly white was the moon ; but she  
At once did on a woven modesty  
Of cloud, and soon went in obscured :  
And we were dark, and vanisht that strange hill.  
But yet it was not long before  
There opened in the sky a narrow door,  
Made with pearl lintel and pearl sill ;  
And the earth's night seem'd pressing there,—  
All as a beggar on some festival would peer,—  
To gaze into a room of light beyond,  
The hidden silver splendour of the moon.  
Yea, and we also, we  
Long gazed wistfully

Towards thee, O morning, come at last,  
And towards the light that thou wilt pour upon us soon !

## II

O soul who still art strange to sense,  
Who often against beauty wouldst complain,  
Doubting between joy and pain :  
If like the startling touch of something keen  
Against thee, it hath been  
To follow from an upland height  
The swift sun hunting rain  
Across the April meadows of a plain,  
Until the fields would flash into the air  
Their joyous green, like emeralds alight ;  
Or when in the blue of night's mid-noon  
The burning naked moon  
Draws to a brink of cloudy weather near,  
A breadth of snow, firm and soft as a wing,  
Stretcht out over a wind that gently goes,—  
Through the white sleep of snowy cloud there grows  
An azure-border'd shining ring,  
The gleaming dream of the approaching joy of her ;—  
What now wilt thou do, Soul ? What now,  
If with such things as these troubled thou wert ?  
How wilt thou now endure, or how  
Not now be strangely hurt ?—  
When utter beauty must come closer to thee  
Than even anger or fear could be ;  
When thou, like metal in a kiln, must lie  
Seized by beauty's mightily able flame ;  
Enjoyed by beauty as by the ruthless glee

Of an unescapable power ;  
Obeying beauty as air obeys a cry ;  
Yea, one thing made of beauty and thee,  
As steel and a white heat are made the same !  
—Ah, but I know how this infirmity  
Will fail and be not, no, not memory,  
When I begin the marvellous hour.  
This only is my heart's strain'd eagerness,  
Long waiting for its bliss.—  
But from those other fears, from those  
That keep to Love so close,  
From fears that are the shadow of delight,  
Hide me, O joys ; make them unknown to-night !

## III

Thou bright God that in dream camest to me last  
night,  
Thou with the flesh made of a golden light,  
Knew I not thee, thee and thy heart,  
Knew I not well, God, who thou wert ?  
Yea, and my soul divinely understood  
The light that was beneath thee a ground,  
The golden light that cover'd thee round,  
Turning my sleep to a fiery morn,  
Was as a heavenly oath there sworn  
Promising me an immortal good :—  
Well I knew thee, God of Marriages, thee and thy flame !  
Ah, but wherefore beside thee came  
That fearful sight of another mood ?  
Why in thy light, to thy hand chained,

Towards me its bondage terribly strained,  
Why came with thee that dreadful hound,  
The wild hound Fear, black, ravenous and gaunt ?  
Why him with thee should thy dear light surround ?  
Why broughtest thou that beast to haunt  
The blissful footsteps of my golden dream ?—  
All shadowy black the body dread,  
All frenzied fire the head,—  
The hunger of its mouth a hollow crimson flame,  
The hatred in its eyes a blaze  
Fierce and green, stabbing the ruddy glaze,  
And sharp white jetting fire the teeth snarl'd at me,  
And white the dribbling rage of froth,—  
A throat that gaped to bay and paws working violently,  
Yet soundless all as a winging moth ;  
Tugging towards me, famishing for my heart ;—  
Even while thou, O golden god, wert still  
Looking the beautiful kindness of thy will  
Into my soul, even then must I be,  
With thy bright promise looking at me,  
Then bitterly of that hound afraid ?—  
Darkness, I know, attendeth bright,  
And light comes not but shadow comes :  
And heart must know, if it know thy light,  
Thy wild hound Fear, the shadow of love's delight.  
Yea, is it thus ? Are we so made  
Of death and darkness, that even thou,  
O golden God of the joys of love,  
Thy mind to us canst only prove,  
The glorious devices of thy mind,  
By so revealing how thy journeying here  
Through this mortality, doth closely bind

Thy brightness to the shadow of dreadful Fear ?—  
Ah no, it shall not be ! Thy joyous light  
Shall hide me from the hunger of fear to-night.

## IV

For wonderfully to live I now begin :  
So that the darkness which accompanies  
Our being here, is fasten'd up within  
The power of light that holdeth me ;  
And from these shining chains, to see  
My joy with bold misliking eyes,  
The shrouded figure will not dare arise.  
For henceforth, from to-night,  
I am wholly gone into the bright  
Safety of the beauty of love :  
Not only all my waking vigours plied  
Under the searching glory of love,  
But knowing myself with love all satisfied  
Even when my life is hidden in sleep ;  
As high clouds, to themselves that keep  
The moon's white company, are all possest  
Silverly with the presence of their guest ;  
Or as a darken'd room  
That hath within it roses, whence the air  
And quietness are taken everywhere  
Deliciously by sweet perfume.



## EPILOGUE



## EPILOGUE

WHAT shall we do for Love these days ?  
How shall we make an altar-blaze  
To smite the horny eyes of men  
With the renown of our Heaven,  
And to the unbelievers prove  
Our service to our dear god, Love ?  
What torches shall we lift above  
The crowd that pushes through the mire,  
To amaze the dark heads with strange fire ?  
I should think I were much to blame,  
If never I held some fragrant flame  
Above the noises of the world,  
And openly 'mid men's hurrying stares,  
Worshipt before the sacred fears  
That are like flashing curtains furl'd  
Across the presence of our lord Love.  
Nay, would that I could fill the gaze  
Of the whole earth with some great praise  
Made in a marvel for men's eyes,  
Some tower of glittering masonries,  
Therein such a spirit flourishing  
Men should see what my heart can sing :  
All that Love hath done to me  
Built into stone, a visible glee ;

Marble carried to gleaming height  
As moved aloft by inward delight ;  
Not as with toil of chisels hewn,  
But seeming poised in a mighty tune.  
For of all those who have been known  
To lodge with our kind host, the sun,  
I envy one for just one thing :  
In Cordova of the Moors  
There dwelt a passion-minded King,  
Who set great bands of marble-hewers  
To fashion his heart's thanksgiving  
In a tall palace, shapen so  
All the wondering world might know  
The joy he had of his Moorish lass.  
His love, that brighter and larger was  
Than the starry places, into firm stone  
He sent, as if the stone were glass  
Fired and into beauty blown.

Solemn and invented gravely  
In its bulk the fabric stood,  
Even as Love, that trusteth bravely  
In its own exceeding good  
To be better than the waste  
Of time's devices ; grandly spaced,  
Seriously the fabric stood.  
But over it all a pleasure went  
Of carven delicate ornament,  
Wreathing up like ravishment,  
Mentioning in sculptures twined  
The blitheness Love hath in his mind ;  
And like delighted senses were  
The windows, and the columns there

Made the following sight to ache  
As the heart that did them make.  
Well I can see that shining song  
Flowering there, the upward throng  
Of porches, pillars and windowed walls,  
Spires like piercing panpipe calls,  
Up to the roof's snow-cloud flight ;  
All glancing in the Spanish light  
White as water of arctic tides,  
Save an amber dazzle on sunny sides.  
You had said, the radiant sheen  
Of that palace might have been  
A young god's fantasy, ere he came  
His serious worlds and suns to frame ;  
Such an immortal passion  
Quiver'd among the slim hewn stone.  
And in the nights it seemed a jar  
Cut in the substance of a star,  
Wherein a wine, that will be poured  
Some time for feasting Heaven, was stored.

But within this fretted shell,  
The wonder of Love made visible,  
The King a private gentle mood  
There placed, of pleasant quietude.  
For right amidst there was a court,  
Where always muskèd silences  
Listened to water and to trees ;  
And herbage of all fragrant sort,—  
Lavender, lad's-love, rosemary,  
Basil, tansy, centaury,—  
Was the grass of that orchard, hid  
Love's amazements all amid.

Jarring the air with rumour cool,  
Small fountains played into a pool  
With sound as soft as the barley's hiss  
When its beard just sprouting is ;  
Whence a young stream, that trod on moss,  
Prettily rimpled the court across.  
And in the pool's clear idleness,  
Moving like dreams through happiness,  
Shoals of small bright fishes were ;  
In and out weed-thickets bent  
Perch and carp, and sauntering went  
With mouching jaws and eyes a-stare ;  
Or on a lotus leaf would crawl,  
A brinded loach to bask and sprawl,  
Tasting the warm sun ere it dipt  
Into the water ; but quick as fear  
Back his shining brown head slipt  
To crouch on the gravel of his lair,  
Where the cooled sunbeams broke in wrack,  
Spilt shatter'd gold about his back.

So within that green-veiled air,  
Within that white-walled quiet, where  
Innocent water thought aloud,—  
Childish prattle that must make  
The wise sunlight with laughter shake  
On the leafage overbowed,—  
Often the King and his love-lass  
Let the delicious hours pass.  
All the outer world could see  
Graved and sawn amazingly  
Their love's delighted riotise,  
Fixt in marble for all men's eyes ;

But only these twain could abide  
In the cool peace that withinside  
Thrilling desire and passion dwelt ;  
They only knew the still meaning spelt  
By Love's flaming script, which is  
God's word written in ecstasies.

And where is now that palace gone,  
All the magical skill'd stone,  
All the dreaming towers wrought  
By Love as if no more than thought  
The unresisting marble was ?  
How could such a wonder pass ?  
Ah, it was but built in vain  
Against the stupid horns of Rome,  
That pusht down into the common loam  
The loveliness that shone in Spain.  
But we have raised it up again !  
A loftier palace, fairer far,  
Is ours, and one that fears no war.  
Safe in marvellous walls we are ;  
Wondering sense like builded fires,  
High amazement of desires,  
Delight and certainty of love,  
Closing around, roofing above  
Our unapproacht and perfect hour  
Within the splendours of love's power.

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